Rugby Union Tetley's Bitter Cup

Seven-up quenches Saracens' title thirst

Robert Armstrong at Twickenham

SARACENS have done English rugby a huge favour by winning the cup 48-18 against Wasps in the most scintillating style seen here for years. In one glorious, sun-splashed afternoon the born-again club from north London banished the memory of recent grinding, one-paced finals. Their spectacular brand of all-purpose football not only yielded seven tries but also set fresh standards.

Comparisons will be made with Newcastle, who are odds-on favourites to clinch the Premiership and deny Saracens the double. The Tyneside club possess more flair and versatility than they have been given credit for, yet Sarries have shown the way forward in entertainment value, marketing and community awareness.

In their first final Tony Diprose's potent blend of southern hemisphere stars, Celts and club stalwarts demonstrated a cutting edge and a big-match temperament of the type normally found only in international matches. From the outset Saracens went for the jugular with ruthless timing, and when Wasps did manage to raise their game and score a dozen points after half-time Diprose and company made them pay dearly for their temerity.

"We don't want our cup win to be merely a flash in the pan; we aim to set standards for ourselves that potentially will benefit rugby in general," said Diprose.

"It was a fantastic feeling to put 48 points on Wasps; along with our 50-point league win over Bath, that must rank as our best performance of the season. Still, we have a big game against Northampton which we have to win to stand any chance of winning the league."

Any lingering doubts about the creative influence of overseas players were surely dispelled by the extraordinary contribution of Michael Lynagh and Philippe Sella, the old masters who are about to retire. As the Wasps director of rugby Nigel Melville acknowledged, Lynagh's distribution and kicking out of hand subdued his players like nothing else they had experienced. As for the Frenchman, he unleashed a repertoire of skills that even his team-mates had not seen before.

Francois Pienaar too was "quite inspirational", according to Diprose, who before the kick-off had reason to believe the South African might not last the full 80 minutes because of a hamstring injury. In the event Pienaar paved the way for two early tries with the urgent power of his driving, and after a brief withdrawal to have stitches inserted in an ear wound the player-coach returned to give his team-mates a dressing down when they were about to let Wasps back in the game.



Ravenscroft celebrates after scoring for Saracens PHOTO: TONY HENSHAW

Pienaar has no plans to return to South Africa despite the resignation of Louis Luyt, the union president there; instead he will see out the remaining 12 months of his Saracens contract.

Wasps, who have now played five finals without a win, were left to contemplate the debris of a painful afternoon in which their younger players looked underpowered and overawed while the senior pros seemed jaded. In the second half Wasps brought on their experienced forwards Buster White and Andy Reed to shore up their disorganised pack, yet there was never a real prospect that the underdogs would claw back a 29-6 half-time deficit.

Lawrence Dallaglio, who clearly needs a three-month break after two years of non-stop rugby, was scathing about the shortcomings of his team. "Every player made two or three basic mistakes in areas such as ball retention, passing and first-phase possession, which adds up to 40 or 50 errors overall," he said. "It was a humbling experience."

Melville expressed pride in the fact that Wasps had fielded 12 Englishmen but that statistic simply underlined the lack of depth in the English game. Indeed, Saracens had built a 22-6 lead before an Englishman, Danny Grewcock, got on the scoresheet with a 38th-minute try. Between times Wasps' Englishmen kicked the ball away and left spaces for Sarries to attack whenever they were sucked into rucks and mauls.

Within 12 minutes Sella and Ryan Constable had charged through to score on the right and in the 10 minutes before half-time Gavin Johnson slashed through the Wasps defence for a third try and Grewcock added his short-range score between the posts.

Lynagh's inch-perfect pass with his boot set up a 48th-minute try for Steve Ravenscroft before Wasps belatedly pulled together with a pushover try by Paul Volley and a gem of a score by Shane Roiser, who sprinted home from halfway courtesy of a pass by Gareth Rees.

Roiser then denied Richard Wallace with a tackle that defied gravity, a last-ditch ankle tap, but Saracens put Wasps back on the rack in the last 10 minutes, scoring spectacular tries through Kyran Bracken and Wallace. Lynagh's 13 points with the boot were entirely superfluous.

Cryptic crossword by Gemini

Across

1 Belligerent, and d—— cheeky (7)
5 City writer lacks style (7)
9 Close to a record (5)
10 Fowl pest affected March's production (9)
11 Passes on without a struggle (5,4)
12 Chain letters? (5)
13 Lift-shafts, say (5)
15 Ground has chute and giant swing (9)
18 Perhaps cringe and pay a fulsome tribute (9)
19 Type of fuel oil refined in northern state (5)
21 Have a little bit of sense! (5)
23 One to tell, and tell again (9)
25 Music master's arrangement for the wind (9)
26 Health food (5)
27 Common spoken, clearly not upper crust (3-4)
28 Leading the brain drain? Not he! (7)

Down

1 He's just up and looking less tired (7)
2 Holding the note; with a strain in the voice (9)
3 Old Ethiopian not half given hell! (5)
4 It's for the Minister to take the lead! (3,6)
5 Rook and knight provide cover for the king (5)
6 . . . am drinking to the team three-quarters (9)
7 Appeared with Andronicus in the NT (5)
8 One position captured by soldiers in counter-thrust (7)
14 Things get whisked around by this helicopter (3-6)
16 Common appellations for prison terms (9)
17 Discomfited, badly taking a leg-pull (3,2,4)
18 Be killed by a mine — that's the hidden danger (7)
20 Not in the document indicated (7)
22 The wages spiral? (5)
23 Way up river from the bay, say (5)
24 Drunk got fired! (3,2)

Last week's solution

HEMANS MIDDAY
U O E Q T E A
AFAREWELLTOARMS
F E H O O T U
FIESTA BOLTHOLE
S L E L B K
SHUFFLED SEESAW
R L
AFTERS TIMELAGS
O E I H A U
PROMULGE MANAND
T A E O M A N
THESUNALSORISES
E O U D T L R
ERNEST THESEA

Motor Racing

Hakkinen leads the procession

Alan Henry in Barcelona

THE McLaren-Mercedes steamroller continued its relentless advance as Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard left the opposition in the dust at the Circuit de Catalunya, lapping all but two cars on the way to their third one-two of the season. The Finn finished first.

In their wake, only Ferrari's Michael Schumacher produced an even halfway-convincing performance to take third place, sustaining hopes that he might yet turn this apparently unstoppable tide in the second half of the season.

It was a race in which the also-rans had to be scrutinised in order to find much in the way of creative tactics or promising driving. Such is the dominance of the McLarens that neither Hakkinen nor Coulthard seemed to be working particularly hard.

In Hakkinen's case that illusion was almost valid. "The car was terrific," he enthused. "I had no problems whatsoever." For Coulthard, hoping to emulate his victory at Imola last month, the race was slightly less convincing. Throughout qualifying he had not felt confident with his car's handling. He duly qualified second alongside Hakkinen on the starting grid, but dropped away steadily from the start and never looked like challenging for the lead.

"My first set of tyres were not so good," said Coulthard, "and I had made changes to the chassis set-up. The car's front end felt a little 'pointy' from the start, but its handling got progressively better and was at its best on the last set of tyres."

Schumacher did everything that could have been expected of him in finishing third, even though he got too much wheel-spin at the start and dropped to fifth place by the end of the opening lap. That allowed his team-mate Eddie Irvine to take third place ahead of Giancarlo Fisichella's Benetton, but after his first refuelling stop Irvine, under team orders, slowed his pace by three seconds in one lap, thereby allowing Schumacher to emerge from his first refuelling stop in third place.

Fisichella, who now found himself back in fifth place, then attempted to overtake Irvine round the outside of the first corner at the start of lap 29, the two cars colliding and spinning into retirement in the gravel trap.

This incident allowed Schumacher a clear run through to third place, despite a 10-second stop-go penalty imposed for speeding in the pit lane.

Fourth place went to Alexander Wurz's Benetton, with Rubens Barrichello having a fine race to bring the Stewart-Ford home fifth ahead of Jacques Villeneuve's Williams and Johnny Herbert's Sauber, and thus scoring the team's first points of the season.

The Guardian Weekly

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Week ending May 24, 1998

Army holds key to Indonesia's future

Andrew Higgins in Jakarta

IT WAS a feeble challenge: a rambling 23-page pamphlet comparing President Suharto to the 10-faced king of a shadow puppet epic. But only a week ago the former army quartermaster who has governed Indonesia for 32 years still worried about trivial *lèse-majesté*. The booklet was banned.

Back in Jakarta after an abruptly abbreviated trip to Egypt and a whirlwind of chaos in his capital, Mr Suharto held emergency talks with his military chiefs. Pique at a 79-year-old scribbler had given way to the agony of an anarchic revolt.

His presidential palace protected by tanks and armoured cars, the welfare ministry of his daughter gutted by fire, the home of a crony tycoon reduced to a charred ruin, the world's longest-serving ruler after Fidel Castro now grapples with a crisis that imperils the very survival of his family and friends. Several of his six children and their offspring have fled to London. Others are in hiding.

The scene at No 55 Angkasa Street illustrated the danger to a regime now striving to protect far more than its dignity. "Suharto is a Dog", read black graffiti spray-painted on the wall outside the smouldering home of Liem Sioe Liong, the richest man in Indonesia and a close friend of Mr Suharto.

The 40-year friendship made Mr Liem's Salim group the country's largest conglomerate. Last week it brought a mob crashing through the front door of the country's most potent ethnic Chinese tycoon. Singed bamboo now pokes from the wreckage. A Mercedes stands torched in the garage.

With heavily armed troops stationed around the traumatised city, the unchecked mayhem on Thursday last week settled into sporadic looting.

Styling himself the Father of Development, Mr Suharto has lost the twin sources of his legitimacy — rapid economic growth and political stability. The foreign investment and ethnic Chinese acumen that drove the economy have dried up. The political landscape is even more barren, pruned of all opposition and bereft of any organised alternative, other than the military.

Unlike Iran in the last days of the Shah, there is no one with the charisma of Ayatollah Khomeini. Megawati Sukarnoputri, one of two principal opposition figures, has some of the prestige that helped Corazon Aquino to oust Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. Just as Mrs Aquino took over the mantle of her assassinated husband, Ms Megawati inherited the following of her ousted father, Indonesia's first president, Sukarno. But she has little flare for politics.

Romania may be a better parallel. When a bloody uprising toppled Nicolae Ceausescu his power fell to a junta dominated by former loyalists in the secret police and armed forces.

All that can thrive in the sterile terrain created by Mr Suharto is the mayhem that began two weeks ago in Medan, north Sumatra, and

continued on page 3



The body of an Indonesian student shot by police is carried away by distressed civilians in Jakarta, while, below, President Suharto prepares to bow to the inevitable PHOTOGRAPHS: KEMAL JUFRI/ALADIN ABDEL NABY

Suharto agrees to stand down

David Lamb in Jakarta

AMID calls from his major civilian allies to "wisely step down", President Suharto announced on Tuesday that he will relinquish power after reshuffling his cabinet and holding general elections, but he did not say when they would take place.

In a national address, the Indonesian leader said he will call new parliamentary elections "as soon as possible", at which time he would declare himself "not available" to serve as president. "I will not be prepared to be elected any more," he said.

His announcement followed a call for his resignation by his close friend, Harmoko, the speaker of parliament and head of Suharto's powerful Golkar party. Mr Harmoko has the power to call an emergency session of



the 500-member People's Consultative Assembly, which re-elected Suharto in March, and the authority to revoke its mandate. — *Los Angeles Times*

Comment, page 14

G8 debt relief package falls short of hopes

Larry Elliott

DEVELOPMENT agencies reacted with barely disguised fury this week as the much-heralded package of debt relief for the world's poorest countries from the G8 summit in Birmingham fell well short of expectations.

The UK Prime Minister announced $100 million from Britain to kick-start an international fight against malaria, but the main lobbying groups criticised the West for failing to fast-track debt relief.

Tony Blair accepted that the communique had not gone as far as some would have liked. But he insisted there had been progress in getting more countries involved in the initiative for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) by 2000.

However, the language in the final communique was much weaker than the terms of the Mauritius Mandate, proposed by the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, at last year's meeting of Commonwealth finance ministers.

The G8 said it supported "the speedy and determined extension of debt relief to more countries" and encouraged all eligible countries to "take the policy measures needed to embark on the process as soon as possible".

Development groups said this amounted to putting the blame on the poor. Andrew Simms of Christian Aid said: "It's Groundhog Day for the world's poor. Each year the G8 pitches up promising to give meaningful debt relief to the poorest countries, and each year they remain trapped in a world of aid dependency."

Chain of hope, page 10
Noam Chomsky, page 15

Austria	AS30	Malta	50c
Belgium	BF80	Netherlands	G 5
Denmark	DK17	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 14	Saudi Arabia	SR 8.50
Germany	DM 4	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 500	Sweden	SK 19
Italy	L 3,500	Switzerland	SF 3.80

Microsoft sued for abuse of monopoly

Mark Tran in New York

THE United States government locked horns with the world's most powerful computer software company on Monday as it launched a landmark legal action against Microsoft Corporation.

The central charge is that Microsoft has abused its monopoly in personal computer operating systems to gain market power in other areas, and particularly the Internet. Microsoft controls 90 per cent of the operating market, largely through its Windows program.

The government wants Microsoft to include the Internet browser of a competitor, Netscape, in Windows 98, the latest version of its operating system. If Microsoft is unwilling to do so, then it should have to disable its own Internet Explorer from Windows, the action says.

As the action was launched the US government went further, accusing Microsoft of trying to carve up the Internet browser market illegally with Netscape, and of trying to destroy Netscape when it refused. This claim forms the most damaging element of the action.

The government claimed that Microsoft sought to enter "an illegal conspiracy to divide the market with Netscape". When Netscape refused, Microsoft "cut off Netscape's air supply", in the words of one Microsoft official.

"No firm should be permitted to use its monopoly power to develop a chokehold on the browser software to access the Internet," said the US attorney-general, Janet Reno, as the charges were announced.

Not since Washington broke up the AT&T phone monopoly in 1982 has the government challenged a company as mighty as Microsoft.

In addition to the justice department's suit, 20 state attorneys-general are also filing their own separate but similar legal challenge.

The government also wants to eliminate provisions in Microsoft's licensing and marketing contracts that restrict the ability of PC makers to choose which browser to install on their machines.

The legal wrangle is likely to go on for years unless the parties settle out of court.

In going against Microsoft, the justice department is challenging an entity with enormous resources. Microsoft can be expected to fight a war of delays and attrition in the hope that the next administration will take a more docile attitude.

Washington Post, page 20

India's tests vital to the defence of a billion lives

YOUR comment (Editorial, May 17) that Indian nuclear tests had little to do with its national security shows a complete lack of understanding of the security environment in South Asia. Since 1974, when India first tested a nuclear device, it has watched China conduct more than 40 nuclear tests, build missiles and target Indian cities, and help Pakistan to build bombs and missiles.

Western countries sent positive signals to both China and Pakistan to continue their weapons development programmes, so long as they did not harm Western interests, in the form of sales of hi-tech defence equipment to China and granting most-favoured nation status.

Indian governments refrained from testing nuclear devices, partly because of their utopian dream of global disarmament and their desire not to increase defence spending, but mainly because of the threat of US sanctions.

The BJP government's decision to stand up to Western hypocrisy and take action to safeguard India's national security is fully understood and applauded by all sections of opinion in India. Besides, Indians feel that if Britain and France need nuclear weapons to defend their 50 million citizens against a non-existent enemy, then surely India's need to possess nuclear weapons to defend nearly a billion lives against real threats from its belligerent neighbours is even greater.
Prem Waatess,
Hayes, Middlesex

INDIA continually tries to gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, but is always unsuccessful due to its abysmal human rights record, especially in the Punjab and Kashmir. The international community has seen behind the "largest democracy" mantra; the politics of non-violence died long ago and has been replaced with open confrontation with its neighbours and an upsurge in extreme Hindu nationalism.

As a Sikh, I feel this nuclear testing is a way to conjure up even more support for the rightwing BJP's "mythology" that India is once again in a "Golden Age" where it is invincible. This will encourage extremist Hindus to further increase oppression of the minorities in India.
Ravinder Singh,
London

Timely help for Sierra Leone

I AM A Sierra Leonean and, as a result of British colonial history, also British. I worked for many years in the Sierra Leone government and diplomatic service and am passionately committed to the establishment of democratic stability and sound economic management there. As a British citizen, I am keen to see that Britain does not abdicate its responsibility towards a country that it fashioned and towards a people that look to it for assistance.

The British media are highlighting a crisis in the Foreign Office that is of little or no concern to Sierra Leoneans (Cook under fire as arms crisis grows, May 17). What matters to us is the outcome. An illegal and brutal regime has been ousted and a democratically elected government restored to power. There should be a policy of intervention in such a situation. This would be an ethical foreign policy par excellence. To have allowed the junta to remain in power would have meant years of slaughter. Tony Blair's intervention is timely and refreshing, but the man of the hour is undoubtedly Peter Penfold.
John E Bankole Jones,
London

AS A Nigerian, my only regret is that Peter Penfold couldn't have been Britain's High Commissioner to Nigeria.
Anthony Ojolola,
London

World Bank as judge and jury

FINANCE ministers from the Group of Seven countries recently met in London to endorse the creation of a global financial supervisory body to monitor international economies and avoid fiascos like the Asian financial crisis. The ministers solicited advice from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and others.

I find it ironic that the World Bank has been asked to participate in shaping such an organisation when the Bank itself fails miserably at monitoring and meeting its financial obligations. A case in point: Oxfam reports that in 1995/96 World Bank president James Wolfensohn made a firm promise to increase social sector loans to developing nations from $4 billion to $5 billion a year (for three years) to provide vital health care, nutrition, education, and Aids prevention.

Bank lending figures for fiscal year 1997 now show that lending for health and education has instead plummeted to $2.25 billion. While a chilling 17 million still die annually from curable diseases and "poor people desperately need these basic services if they are to participate in markets on a more equal footing", one must ask who is supervising the performance of the World Bank?
Karen Hodgson,
Victoria, BC, Canada

History informs Israelis' fears

AS A British-born Jew who served in the Royal Navy in the second world war and who lived in South Africa for 25 years, always opposing apartheid, I am often ashamed at the procrastination of this Israeli government over honouring the Oslo agreement.

Yet my antagonisms are not always sustained when I consider that many Israeli Jews who voted for Netanyahu manifested the fears, even if some think exaggerated, of once again being overwhelmed by the forces of evil who killed 6 million of us in the Holocaust, unless we protect our security at all costs.

While many of us sympathise with the Palestinian Arabs and their aspirations, we should also understand those Israelis and Jews who still recall that few came to their aid when the Nazis carried out their systematic destruction of European Jewry. There might even be justification for the view held by some Jews that anti-Semitism is not dead, but slumbering.
B Harris,
Haifa, Israel

New Zealand's dose of realism

I CAN only put G R A McMurray's paucity of knowledge about New Zealand's real progress from "socialist protectionism" to a more realistic economy down to the writer's distance from his subject (May 10). It is simply a nonsense to claim that (responsible) trade unions have been denied legal recognition, as many of New Zealand's union secretaries will attest.

Our economy is not buoyant, but it is growing in real terms (after years of government-led stagnation), and the resilient kiwi is alive and well. My son works after senior school at a supermarket, saving for his studies, and earns over NZ$8 per hour for his check-out duties.

As for the underclass, it could be argued that our unemployed, and unemployable, were for too many years hidden in government "work" on the Railways, Post Office and so-called Ministry of Works.

When I last looked, we were a democracy. I wonder who sanctioned the claimed "legislative fiat" so destructive to our treasured way of life. What has happened is that New Zealanders are waking up to the truth that the government does not print money in a warehouse and distribute it to sleepy and unproductive workers. It has to be earned by a small island nation with a population about as big as an average English city, competing as part of a global economy.

The new mood certainly is for more individual responsibility, away from an oppressive preoccupation with government answers for every problem. The going is not easy, but we are going. Plus for the most part the weather is good, the fishing's fine, and the All Blacks keep winning! Bring on the English rugby team, what's left of them.
Mike Bridgman,
Auckland, New Zealand

In defence of Chomsky

I CANNOT believe Hugo Young (Prophet of the left rooted in the past, May 17) is not aware of the importance of Chomsky's analyses in underpinning J K Galbraith's thesis that the cosy links among governments, industrial and financial conglomerates have encouraged the development of an economic orthodoxy which ignores the most important problems facing humanity.

Nor can I believe that he is unaware of the cogent arguments that the trend towards fewer and fewer workers producing enormous quantities of consumer goods of increasingly marginal utility is an inevitable consequence of the acceptance of these orthodoxies.

The economic challenge of the millennium is to solve the problem of why, although we can produce the goods required to enable a large proportion of the earth's population to have a decent standard of living, we are only able to distribute incomes in such a way as to deny many of them access to the necessities of life.

As long as we devote far more resources to developing a replacement for compact discs than to the serious inequalities in society, Chomsky will continue to command my admiration.
Norman Jones,
Manchester

Briefly

THANK you for David Newnham's article about air quality on long-haul flights (May 10).

Last year I visited Jamaica on a British Airways flight. The outward-bound flight was uneventful, and discomfort from brittle asthma was minimal. But on the return flight I was in difficulty after a couple of hours. To reach the toilet and get back to my seat meant constant use of inhalers. Once back in my seat, it took me 30 minutes to recover my breath. All this for just 20 paces. I thought it was me. Now I know it was lack of oxygen in the aircraft.

If we insist nowadays on food safety, then we should also insist on travel safety. Should travel agents have a check list of operators who do not cut corners?
Michael Reyntiens,
Chard, Somerset

IF DEREK MALCOLM is going to review a film about paedophilia (May 10), surely he could inform himself on the subject beforehand. Of course children a lot younger than Lolita's 12 years can be sexually provocative if they have been taught to be by previous seductive sexual abuse. Is this any reason to justify further abuse or blame the victim?
Anna Woods,
Wellington, New Zealand

AM I doomed for the rest of my natural life to be subjected to people unable to distinguish between "Ulster" and "Northern Ireland" (April 19)? I was born in Ulster, and also in the Irish Republic, yet I am not schizophrenic, nor is my mother a particularly large woman.
Andy Smith,
Masaka, Uganda

IN Phil Daoust's otherwise excellent review of Dame Edna's new show (May 3) he quotes her as saying: "There was white hair everywhere. You'd drop a chocolate cake, you'd pick up a chocolate slice." What Edna actually said was: "There was white hair everywhere. You'd drop a piece of chocolate cake and pick up a piece of coconut slice!"
R A Rodriguez,
Toronto, Canada

NANCY BANKS-SMITH invokes the prescient genius of Nigel Kneale (May 17). Does she remember Quatermass II with its Dome built by a secretive government, guarded by zombies, full of corrosive, living slime set to invade the world? As a local says: "They're buildin' a huge, great place. Great iron things . . . If you want funny things to happen, just leave it to the government." Makes you think, eh?
Tony Coult,
London

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Pakistan nuclear test 'inevitable'

Suzanne Goldenberg in Islamabad and Ian Black

A NUCLEAR test by Pakistan is inevitable, Islamabad's foreign minister, Gohar Ayub, said on Sunday. "We are going ahead, Inshallah [God willing]. The decision has been taken to test," he told the Guardian.

Nervousness about a Pakistani explosion — spurred by United States intelligence reports of preparations at the test site in the Chagai mountain range in Baluchistan — reverberated around the region and beyond last weekend's G8 meeting in Birmingham.

The summit ended with leaders of the world's most powerful countries expressing alarm at developments since nuclear tests in India last week, but showing no sign that the G8 countries were any closer on the question of sanctions, which have been implemented so far by the US and Japan.

Mr Ayub put the blame for a new nuclear arms race on the irresolute response of the international community to the five tests conducted by New Delhi last week.

"It's a lukewarm attitude," he said of the G8 condemnations of India. "Three countries, the UK, France, and Russia don't support sanctions, and the rest will all fall apart. The American corporate sector will put pressure on because of their interests in India."

The United Nations secretary-general, Kofi Annan, said he hoped Pakistan would receive assurances from other countries over its security, discouraging it from any test. He said he was appealing to Pakistan not to follow India's example.

The US senate intelligence committee had earlier said it would let Pakistan have US-built F-16 fighter aircraft if it abandoned the test. Pakistan has paid for the planes but delivery has been blocked for 10 years by a congressional ban aimed at preventing it from developing nuclear weapons.

But Mr Ayub has been dismissive of US inducements not to test. "If the international community can take no action against India, then we are forced to test a deterrent. No one can stop us from doing so."

The US deputy secretary of state, Strobe Talbott, who held talks last week with the Pakistani prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, said: "They have made quite clear they didn't think there was any magic wand to be waved."

Washington Post, page 19



Demonstrators support Mr Vajpayee's decision to carry out nuclear tests PHOTOGRAPH: SUNIL MALHOTRA

India's leader stokes Hindu machismo

INDIA'S Hindu nationalist prime minister flaunted his government's controversial nuclear tests last week in the face of the club of atomic superpowers, *writes Suzanne Goldenberg.*

"We have a big bomb now," declared Atal Bihari Vajpayee. "India is now a nuclear weapons state," he told the India Today weekly magazine. "We have a big bomb now for which [the] necessary command and control system is also in place."

But a strain of nervousness behind the bravura soon became apparent when a government spokesman issued a "clarification". What Mr Vajpayee meant was: "We have the capacity for a big bomb now."

The magazine interview, and a series of stage-managed meetings with groups including loyalists of the prime minister's Bharatiya Janata party, are intended to stoke popular support to help the government ride out international anger at the five underground nuclear tests India conducted last week — the country's first in 24 years.

Mr Vajpayee told BJP supporters gathered on the lawns of his Race Course Road residence: "We won't utilise weapons against others, but if we are attacked we will not hesitate to use it to defend ourselves."

Some analysts had predicted India would be more willing to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty after the tests, in part because its scientists have enough data to carry on their research in laboratory conditions. However, Mr Vajpayee said there was no question of signing a treaty which he said was discriminatory.

New Delhi publicly rejects the notion that economic sanctions from the United States, Japan, Australia and other countries could damage an economy already in recession.

There is also resistance in New Delhi to admitting the possibility of an arms race with Pakistan. In media circles, the tests are already being called "Vajpayee's Viagra", after the American anti-impotency drug, and there are signs the machismo is catching.

Mr Vajpayee is a life-long member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Hindu extremist organisation widely believed to be the secret power behind the government.

The RSS has strongly pushed the BJP towards making India go nuclear, and Mr Vajpayee tried to carry out a test during his first tenure as prime minister in 1996.

The Dalai Lama this week threw his support behind the government's decision to test nuclear weapons. "Some big countries say only they have the right to nuclear weapons. India is a big country and in that case it should have the right," he said.

The Buddhist leader tempered his statement by adding: "I am against nuclear weapons and believe they should be eliminated on a global basis. When China called for a ban on nuclear weapons some years ago, I supported that."

His statements, however qualified, are bound to add to suspicion between China and India. So far New Delhi has not disputed China's sovereignty over Tibet. But New Delhi has hinted it could play the Tibetan card if the Chinese continue to describe India's nuclear testing policy as evidence of ambition to impose hegemony in South Asia.

Indonesia in turmoil

Continued from page 1

spread to Jakarta after security forces shot dead six students last week at the capital's Trisakti university.

"The people here never had any lessons in politics. To protest for them is to burn," said Hariman Siregar, a doctor who helped lead a doomed student revolt in 1974 and spent three years in jail. "This is what we we call development without change. So long as the economy was going up we were fine. But what is left of Asian values now? Looting and burning."

When mob-rule took hold of Jakarta last week, Dr Hariman was meeting with other veteran activists at the University of Indonesia's medical faculty, the focal point of both his own failed campaign and the 1966 student-led uprising that brought Mr Suharto to power. Last week its morgue contained the corpses of about 175 people incinerated in the battle to remove him.

They argued over how long it would take for Mr Suharto to step down. But no one doubted he would go. "The crucial point now is not whether he steps down but when," said Gulard Wikngosastro, an obstetrician.

The timing rests with the generals. "Everything now depends on one factor: the military," said Kwik Kian Gie, an adviser to Ms Megawati. But the military is split into feuding fiefdoms.

The troops patrolling ravaged streets have clearly declared their allegiance. They wear the green berets of the strategic reserve command, led by Mr Suharto's ambitious son-in-law, Probowo Subianto. Marines who shook hands with protesters have vanished.

There is intense speculation of a split between Gen Probowo, a veteran of East Timor with a reputation for brutality, and General Wiranto, the more popular commander of the armed forces, who last week described the reform demands of protesting students as "normal" and "moral".

Before he cut short his state visit to Cairo last week, Mr Suharto mumbled enigmatically: "If I am no longer trusted, I will become a sage." Such a role, he said, would allow him "to get closer to Allah". Now in Jakarta his main concern is staying close to power.

A politician of legendary cunning, he revoked fuel price increases mandated by the International Monetary Fund. The move suggests a dual purpose: to shift the blame for economic hardship to the IMF and rupture a bail-out accord that, if ever fully implemented, would tear out the corrupt core of his regime. Having already reneged on two earlier IMF deals, he is playing a dangerous game of chicken.

For the people, however, the issue is no longer the price of petrol or kerosene cooking fuel. It is Mr Suharto himself and the crony capitalism they see as widening the gulf between rich and poor.

Finance, page 16

Transatlantic trade deal placates EU

Martin Walker

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton and Tony Blair took a giant step towards ending the long transatlantic row over United States trade sanctions on Monday, and declared themselves committed to bringing environmental and trade unionist "stakeholders" into negotiations on further trade liberalisation.

"We agreed new steps to dismantle unilateral and multilateral trade barriers on manufactures, services and agriculture, while maintaining the highest standards for labour and the environment," Mr Clinton said, announcing a new "transatlantic economic partnership" which officials claimed could boost US trade with the European Union by $160 billion a year.

"This is an effort to give a voice to all the stakeholders, environmental and labour and other elements of civil society, in a new paradigm that ought to be mirrored in trade negotiations around the world," Mr Clinton added.

The agreement was reached in Downing Street talks between Mr Clinton and Mr Blair, as current president of the EU Council of Ministers. They share an ideological outlook that is sometimes dubbed the Third Way, or post-modern social democracy. It seeks to transcend traditional left and right, combine the free market with a social conscience, and replace welfare with "social investment".

But Monday was the first time it had been put into the context of world trade, and represents the first international fruit of the Clinton-Blair ideological relationship.

"This is something Tony Blair and I think we ought to be doing," Mr Clinton said. "We agree that we don't exist as economic animals alone, and if we don't include these broader issues of human rights, labour rights and the environment, our trade policies will prove self-defeating."

Mr Blair said the two men had also "avoided a showdown over sanctions". European business is incensed at the long-standing threat of penalties — under the US Helms-Burton Act — against foreign firms investing in Cuban property nationalised by Fidel Castro.

It is also angry about the Iran Libya Sanctions Act passed by a Republican-dominated Congress in 1996. This requires the president to impose penalties on firms that invest more than $20 million a year in the oil and gas sectors of those two countries, which are suspected of sponsoring terrorism.

Mr Clinton agreed to waive penalties over Cuba, and Europe accepted the US case that many of the Castro nationalisations were illegal under international law.

That admission by the EU, and promises to increase its co-operation and intelligence sharing to stop dangerous technology from reaching states suspected of sponsoring terrorism, were aimed at winning over the anti-Castro and anti-Tehran hawks of the US Congress and ending the bruising sanctions row.

Mr Clinton also agreed to waive sanctions against the French oil group Total for its new investments in Iran. This gives the green light to Shell and BP to proceed with their oil development projects in Iran.

Ethnic Albanians flash the victory sign on their way to the funeral of Agron Rrahman, who was killed by Serbian police PHOTO: YANNIS BEHRAKIS

Milosevic and Kosovars agree to hold weekly talks for peace

KOSOVO Albanian leaders held their first meeting last week with the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, and agreed to hold weekly meetings to try to halt the province's escalating war, ***reports Jonathan Steele in Belgrade***.

Mr Milosevic said: "This meeting could be considered as the start toward a peaceful solution of the Kosovo crisis."

Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), said: "It seems there is readiness to move ahead toward a peaceful political solution to the Kosovo issue."

In spite of protest resignations by some of his team, Mr Rugova went ahead with the Belgrade meeting brokered by the United States special envoy, Richard Holbrooke.

The encounter was never intended as a negotiating session, but was designed to break the ice before delegations from the two sides start talks in Pristina, the Kosovo capital.

Only then will it become clear whether Mr Milosevic is willing to make serious concessions towards granting the sort of autonomy the province enjoyed until 1989, with its own parliament and police. With most Kosovans demanding full independence, anything less would be difficult for Mr Rugova to accept.

So far Belgrade has offered only cultural autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia. Ethnic Albanians, who make up 90 per cent of the population, would get the same representation as other ethnic minorities on several low-level committees.

At last week's meeting Mr Rugova was flanked by four advisers, including the former communist leader Mahmut Bakalli and the editor of the nationalist independent daily Koha Ditore, Veton Surroi. Neither knew of Mr Rugova's agreement to meet Mr Milosevic until it was announced by the US envoy the day before.

Mr Holbrooke had held meetings with Mr Rugova at his home. Two members of Mr Rugova's advisory team resigned when the deal was announced.

Lebed's win strikes chill in Kremlin

James Meek in Moscow

ALEXANDER LEBED, the former general who believes destiny has chosen him to save Russia, took his first big step towards the Kremlin this week, easily winning runoff elections for governor of the rich, strategic Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk.

It was one of the most bizarre, expensive and hard-fought campaigns in Russia's short democratic history, pitting the 48-year-old airborne forces veteran against the establishment-backed incumbent, Valery Zubov.

Final results in from 95 per cent of polling stations showed General Lebed with 57 per cent of the vote against Mr Zubov's 38 per cent.

The Lebed victory will severely alarm the political establishment and provide a secure rear base from which the general can launch an assault on the Kremlin in presidential elections in 2000. And it confirms a cardinal shift in the disaffected, anti-establishment vote away from extreme nationalists and traditional communists towards the neo-Gaullist solutions of patriots such as Gen Lebed and the mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov.

Gen Lebed — a southern Russian who has never lived in Siberia — campaigned the length and breadth of Krasnoyarsk territory to overcome the suspicions of the tough, cynical electorate.

Often stiff and awkward, sometimes aggressive with hecklers, he was more earnest than inspirational, relying on a glib stream of rhetorical one-liners to carry him through long town meetings.

Behind the general's homely style was a group of powerful backers, leading many to question just what he had promised them.

Among them was the outspoken tycoon — and now secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States — Boris Berezovsky; Vladimir Gusinsky, a media magnate; and Anatoly "The Ox" Bykov, a banker said to be one of the largest shareholders in Krasnoyarsk's scandal-plagued aluminium plant.

At one point the former star of Zorro, the wrinkled French hearthrob Alain Delon — huge in Russia — arrived in a private jet to support his "friend" Gen Lebed.

Mr Zubov, a quiet, apolitical academic who counted on the assumed support of a far-off President Boris Yeltsin, struggled to fight back.

Last week the ageing diva of Russia's campy Europop scene, Alla Pugachova, flounced grumpily into Siberia with a brief to give the incumbent some showbiz credibility. Unfortunately, she revealed that she simply adored Gen Lebed. "Lebed is a bright star, just a wonderful person," she said. "There is too little space here for a man like him."

The general's reputation as an authoritarian, who values obedience rather than intelligence in subordinates, is both his strength and his weakness. He has yet to persuade the country's liberals that he is anything more than an ignorant, chauvinist martinet with an alarming choice of friends. The darkest cloud over him remains his alliance with Mr Yeltsin's disgraced former bodyguard, the unashamedly anti-democratic intriguer Alexander Korzhakov.

Among his supporters he is seen as a patriotic man of action, who did something to try to save the Soviet Union and Russia rather than crying over it. An army officer for 26 years, he has managed to define his Soviet tours in Afghanistan, the Caucasus and the Baltics as paradigms of selfless service to the motherland by an honest soldier angrily but dutifully carrying out the orders of Politburo fools.

He won national gratitude in 1996 when, as the president's security council secretary, he extracted Russia from the unwinnable war in Chechenia. But during his time in uniform he never took on the sort of political task involving backroom wheeler-dealing, alliance-forming, persuasion and playing groups off against one other of which Mr Yeltsin remains the master.

Russian radar base in Cyprus alarms West

Chris Drake in Nicosia and Richard Norton-Taylor

THE Russian S-300 missile system due for delivery to Cyprus in the coming months would provide Moscow's intelligence chiefs with top-secret information on military aircraft movements in the region, including monitoring all flights in and out of Britain's base on the island at RAF Akrotiri.

Defence experts say it is this fear that is driving Western efforts to get the order cancelled, and not the ostensible argument that the missiles could trigger a war between Greece and Turkey, both Nato allies.

The reason for concern is the powerful "Tombstone" radar which forms part of the system. With a range of 320km, it would illuminate Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Jordan.

Britain has its own radar station in Cyprus on Mount Olympus, but the Russian version is superior. Britain and the United States fear Moscow will be able to collect information that is highly valuable to Russia's Middle East allies: Syria, Iraq, and perhaps Iran.

A military expert said: "Satellites are fine for watching immovable objects. This Russian system would wreck the West's current exclusive monitoring which keeps everything cosy between them, Turkey, Israel and their other allies in the region, including those in the Gulf."

In London, Whitehall downplayed the significance of the Russian radar system, insisting that Britain was concerned about the missiles and the impact on what one official called "the security of Cyprus and the Mediterranean area".

RAF Akrotiri, Britain's biggest overseas military air base, is a key staging post for operations in the Middle East, the Gulf, Africa and eastern Europe. The climate makes it ideal for training, and the US uses it as a base for its U2 spy jets, which monitor the 1989 Camp David peace accord between Israel and Egypt.

Turkey has threatened to destroy the system either while it is being delivered or soon after.

Cyprus claims the system is purely for defensive purposes in the event of a Turkish attack. Privately, ministers acknowledge the missiles were ordered to focus international attention and so help break the deadlock in the reunification talks.

President Glafkos Clerides had said he would cancel the missiles if there were progress on the Cyprus problem. Britain and the US are leading attempts to present him with a face-saving way out, with hopes pinned on finding a way to appease Turkey at next month's European Union summit in Cardiff.

The Week

US LAW enforcement officers arrested bankers from 12 of Mexico's largest financial institutions on charges linking them to Latin American drug cartels in what officials described as the biggest money laundering investigation in US history.

XAVIERE Tiberi, the wife of the mayor of Paris, was remanded in police custody as evidence mounted of a decades-long pattern of sleaze, kickbacks and illicit party funding at the town hall that was run for 16 years by Jacques Chirac before he was elected French president.

ALL tobacco advertising is to be banned in Europe after the European Parliament in Strasbourg voted by 314 to 211 to defeat a blocking amendment on the legality of the ban.

TIBETAN activists fasting in New Delhi to protest against Chinese rule of their homeland suspended their hunger strike on its 18th day after MPs from several countries promised to address their concerns.

THE worst forest fires for half a century are burning across Mexico, threatening communities and virgin rainforest and causing smoke-hazed cities in the US to issue health warnings.

GUNMEN in Sri Lanka shot dead the first mayor to be elected in 15 years in Jaffna, a former Tamil separatist stronghold in the north recently seized by the country's army.

FELIX SOMM, a Swiss national and former head of the German subsidiary of CompuServe, the Internet provider, went on trial in Munich charged with disseminating child, animal and violent pornography in cyberspace.

THOUSANDS of people marched in three Turkish cities to demand that the gunmen who shot and seriously wounded the human rights activist Akin Birdal in Ankara be caught and brought to justice.

AN INTERCEPTOR missile being developed to guard US troops suffered its fifth setback when it failed to hit its target at a test range in New Mexico.

AS AN outpouring of respect and admiration flooded the airwaves and the Internet for Frank Sinatra, his family squabbled over the dead singer's $200 million business empire.

Obituary, page 12

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton addressed the World Trade Organisation in Geneva on the importance of freedom of trade in goods and services. President Fidel Castro of Cuba sat in the front row, listened to the translation and took notes.

Women in Iran targeted by new laws

Julian Borger in Tehran

HAVING lost one battle after another at the polls, in the courts and in the streets, Iran's conservatives have launched a counter-offensive against President Mohammed Khatami. This time they are using one of their strongest weapons — the parliament — on the country's most emotive battleground: women's rights.

Last week members of the Majlis (the Islamic consultative assembly) finalised two bills which together represent a powerful yank backwards on the hands of Iran's social clock. If passed, the legislation would outlaw press coverage of domestic violence, stifle criticism of laws affecting women and segregate medical services.

The bills go further than even the strict Islamic code enforced under the late Ayatollah Khomeini, at a time when the new president is trying to nudge society towards a more relaxed interpretation of religious law.

They target women at a time when there is a female vice-president, women are taking up a wider variety of jobs, and many have been challenging the taboos of the Islamic revolution by pushing their *hejabs* (headscarves) back millimetre by millimetre.

President Khatami's culture minister, Ataollah Mohajerani, said the government had little power to stop the bills, but denied they would reverse the trend towards reform. "The reforms will not break. They have the support of the entire nation: they are like a waterfall."

The medical legislation would require parallel healthcare systems for men and women. The press bill would ban the "exploitation of women's images" and outlaw "the creation of conflicts between men and women by propagating women's rights outside the legal and Islamic framework".

The second clause aims to prevent coverage of domestic violence in Iran's increasingly varied range of newspapers, and to stifle growing debate over the application to women of Islamic law.

Shirin Ebadi, a human rights lawyer in Tehran, said "These laws are to turn back the clock. They are supposed to create disappointment among the women who voted for Khatami. They are meant to create lethargy again. You will think yesterday was better than today, and it will stop you going forwards."

The overwhelming victory by President Khatami, a moderate cleric who won 70 per cent of the vote a year ago, stunned conservative clerics who have struggled to limit his powers. A conservative attempt to imprison Tehran's moderate mayor, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, on fraud charges was abandoned last month after supporters demanded his release on bail.

Mohammad Nobakht, the head of the Majlis budget committee, rejects allegations that the bills are a political assault on the president.

"The intention is to uphold Islamic laws in order to serve society better. The belief behind them is that women are separate beings who should be protected by laws so that they're not used as tools," Mr Nobakht said, although he added that he had reservations over the practicality of the medical bill.



Palestinians carry the body of a protester shot dead in the Gaza Strip last week PHOTOGRAPH: AHMED JADALLAH

Israelis kill eight Arabs during clashes

ISRAELI troops shot dead eight Palestinian demonstrators, including two boys, as protests to mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of Israel descended into the bloodiest clashes seen in the West Bank and Gaza since 1996, ***writes Julian Borger in Ramallah***.

Last week's killings looked likely to trigger a new wave of unrest. The Palestinian leadership has tried to keep a lid on a growing sense of frustration, banking on progress in peace talks led by the United States. But there were increasing signs on the ground that things were slipping out of their control.

The deaths took place in the Gaza Strip, where Israeli soldiers used live ammunition to disperse protesters throwing stones and petrol bombs.

About 80 Palestinians were injured in Gaza, and more than 100 in the West Bank, where Israeli forces opened fire with rubber-coated metal bullets at crowds of stone-throwing youths in the cities of Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus and Jenin. There were also scuffles in East Jerusalem.

Protests erupted soon after ceremonies to commemorate the exile and dispossession of the Palestinian people in the 1948 war which established the Jewish state. Palestinians know the day as Nakba (the Catastrophe).

Palestinian police made some effort, but were unable to restrain the crowd. Israeli sharpshooters took up positions on a steep slope above the road and targeted the stone throwers with rubber-coated metal bullets normally used for crowd control. Hundreds of Ramallah residents watched the unfolding battle from the surrounding hills, howling with anxiety each time a demonstrator was hit.

It was the bloodiest day in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since September 1996, when clashes took 61 Palestinian and 15 Israeli lives.

● US efforts to restart direct peace talks continued last week in Washington, where the US secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, met the Israeli prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu. There was "no breakthrough", the US state department said.

The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, had surprise talks with Mrs Albright in London on Monday. After meeting the British prime minister, Tony Blair, he said: "Netanyahu has not offered anything tangible through Madeleine Albright."

US firm 'to patent key gene codes'

Paul Brown and Martin Walker in Brussels

A UNITED STATES multinational company has announced plans to unravel the entire human genetic code by 2001 and sell the information to scientific institutions and drug companies — patenting the most valuable gene sequences to protect its investment.

The decision came last week on the day the European Parliament agreed a controversial European Union directive that allows companies to patent human, plant and animal genes and so charge royalties on medical or agricultural applications.

The US project, privately funded by the Perkin-Elmer Corporation of Norwalk, Connecticut, follows a technical breakthrough by the company which allows robot machines to plot the human gene sequences 10 times faster and more cheaply than previously thought possible. The company aims to make a profit by beating by several years a federal effort to achieve the same results.

The company has teamed up with J. Craig Venter, a controversial figure who pioneered isolating gene sequences, patenting them and selling them to companies. He now heads the non-profit Institute for Genomic Research, in Rockville.

Tony White, chief executive officer of Perkin-Elmer, said: "We are not a philanthropic organisation, we have a revenue model for this. We are sure people will want to buy the information."

He said most of the information would be available to companies and scientific institutions on a pay-to-view basis on sophisticated websites. "If necessary we will patent 100 to 300 of the very significant genes, but we do not know yet. We will license those genes. We do not want to hold them hostage. We want to contract people for research."

Euro law, page 6

Standing for power is a millionaire's game

US DIARY
Martin Kettle

THE United States' rate of inflation is at its lowest for 30 years, President Clinton was able to boast recently. But while the president rides high in the polls on the strength of his sound financial management, the rate of inflation in American election campaign spending is ballooning out of all control.

Campaign receipts by candidates for this year's November mid-term elections have already increased by 14 per cent compared with the equivalent point in the 1996 election cycle, the Federal Election Commission recently reported. Between them, the 1,509 men and women who aspire to be elected later this year have raised $338 million to finance their campaigns, and they still have two-thirds of it left to spend as the races hot up.

Nowhere is the funding and spending spiralling higher than in California, where this year voters of the most populous state in the Union will elect a state governor, a US senator, 52 congressmen and a variety of state and local officials. And, as is the norm these days in each cycle of American elections, California is breaking all the records and pointing the way for future campaigning.

No race for the US Senate, for example, is as expensive as the one in which Barbara Boxer, one of the state's two incumbent Democratic women senators, is defending the seat which she won for the first time in 1992. Boxer has so far raised nearly $9 million to defend the seat, a figure exceeded only by her principal Republican challenger, the car alarm magnate Darrell Issa, who has drawn in more than $10.2 million.

Important though they are, the cost of a campaign and the fund-raising that it engenders are just the start of it. The millionaire Issa is reckoning to spend a further $15 million of his own money in the race for the Republican nomination alone. This underlines a further important aspect of this and other races, that American electioneering — especially when you are challenging an incumbent — is a rich man's sport. And, since a rich man's private funding allows a party to divert its own money into other contests, rich men have both an advantage within, and an attraction for, their parties.

Nowhere are these issues more dramatically highlighted than in the race for the California governorship, in which the long-time Republican incumbent, Pete Wilson, is stepping down this autumn. Here, in a reversal of the state's senatorial contest, the big money battle is taking place on the Democratic side, as three main candidates struggle for the right to challenge Wilson's Republican successor, Dan Lungren.

The most important candidate for the Democratic nomination — though not necessarily the most likely winner — is a self-made multimillionaire businessman, Al Checchi, a former chairman of Northwest Airlines who is making his first run for political office.

The latest in a series of rich businessmen who have hankered for elective rather than financial power — a series that includes Ross Perot and Steve Forbes — Checchi has already spent some $30 million of his own money on the campaign for the nomination. If he is given his party's blessing on June 2, Checchi is likely to push his spending total up towards the all-time record, currently held — naturally — by a Californian, the oil millionaire Michael Huffington whom Boxer defeated for the Senate last time around.

Checchi's strategy has taken full account of his financial power — his





has been almost wholly a television campaign. He has made few speeches, concentrating on personalities rather than issues when he has taken up the mike, and his TV ads have been widely condemned as consistently negative. Like the Huffington campaign a few years back, the Checchi campaign has responded angrily, and at times dirtily, to the constant charges that he is trying to buy his way into office.

The other striking feature of the Checchi campaign, however, is that his tactic seems to be failing. As June 2 nears, Checchi trails in the polls behind the most lacklustre of his rivals, the state's lieutenant-governor, Gray Davis, who served for several years as chief-of-staff to California's last Democratic governor, Jerry Brown. Checchi appears unable to push his poll ratings out of the 20-30 per cent range. Both he and his one-time principal rival, Jane Harman, who sits in the US Congress for a Los Angeles district and whose campaign is substantially funded by her husband, have suffered from the same public disenchantment with heavily-funded modern political campaigning.

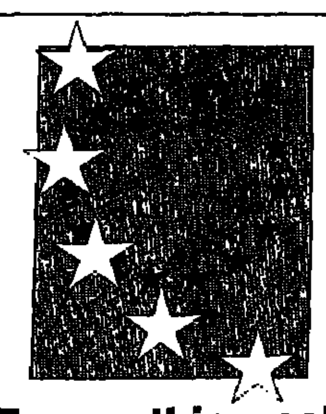
There is a real sense in California that Checchi's money will not be enough to win him the nomination. If that is the case, then it will have been a bad primary season for rich candidates. Last week, for instance, in the state of Nebraska — which is about as different from California as a state can be — the Republican gubernatorial primary was won by a candidate called Mike Johanns. Johanns did not have the money that his two rivals, a free-spending local businessman and a dyed-in-the-wool religious conservative, were able to deploy but he won because he came across as decent and sincere, and perhaps because he refused to wander off into the political long grass from where his opponents were offering huge cuts in local property taxes and a ban on jobs for homosexuals.

There is an obvious danger in trying to draw too many comparisons between California and Nebraska, and an even greater one in trying to project broader generalisations from coincidence. Nevertheless these events run counter to the prevailing American political wisdom. This says that television advertising is the only certain way of shifting voter allegiances, and therefore candidates must raise more and more funds to acquire the money to buy the air-time that is necessary to persuade American voters to change their minds.

This wisdom, which became the gospel according to Bill Clinton during his re-election campaign in 1996, remains almost unchallenged among the consultants who have made themselves expensively indispensable to political candidates, and whose services inevitably concentrate on TV advertising techniques. The handful of "off-year" electoral contests last year appeared to confirm this, especially a high-spending Republican victory in a Congressional byelection in New York City.

Money, vital to modern politics and political influence, is not necessarily the key to electoral success. It may even, as Huffington once found and as Checchi may find again next month, become part of the problem, not part of the solution. In the end, a gratifyingly large number of voters still prefer a decent candidate who talks sense on the issues that concern them. It was, after all, one of the reasons they elected Clinton twice and why they continue to support him still.

MEPs eager to show they have teeth



Europe this week

Martin Walker

THE European Parliament in Strasbourg, after much rhetoric about the shameless way their various national governments had skirted the Maastricht treaty to fix a deal over the control of Europe's new central bank, finally gave in last week. The final, almost token rebellions fizzled out in a self-congratulatory debate on the parliament's role in imposing democratic accountability on the new European Central Bank (ECB).

The debate ended with a ringing endorsement of the six nominees to the Bank's board by a vote of 439 to 40, with 59 abstentions. Dutchman Wim Duisenberg was approved to run the new bank and guide the monetary policy of the first 11 countries in the euro zone. Parliament's initial outrage at France's attempt to force Duisenberg's early retirement faded away when financial markets showed no concern at this sign of the bank's vulnerability to political influence.

There was one victory for parliament, which passed by a single vote an amendment aimed at punishing the French, by temporarily excluding them from a seat on the bank's board. It was a complex ploy, calling for any resignation by the ECB president (Duisenberg who nominally has an eight-year term) and vice-president (France's Christian Noyer, whose term is four years) to be separated by a decent interval.

Noyer's job is to keep the French seat warm for the current head of the Banque de France, Jean-Claude Trichet, who is supposed to succeed Duisenberg in 2002 under the gentleman's agreement reached at the special European Union summit earlier this month. The effect of the amendment, devised by the Irish Liberal MEP Pat Cox, will impose a gap between Noyer's departure and Trichet's succession, during which time France may not be represented on the board at all.

The one serious warning that was delivered to the new bank board came from the British Labour MEP Alan Donnelly, who acknowledged that price stability was the priority, but stressed that once that was achieved the bank would have to carry out the other clauses of the Maastricht treaty on the pursuit of full employment.

"We have to ensure that monetary policy makes its contribution to fighting unemployment," Donnelly stressed, serving notice that this would be a constant theme of the bank's quarterly consultation sessions with parliament.

Duisenberg may or may not take that seriously, but as a former Socialist finance minister in the Netherlands, he will not dismiss it out of hand. The question is whether parliament, ever so proud of its dignities and its vaunted new powers under the Amsterdam treaty, deserves to be taken seriously as an institution. The best argument in favour is that the lobbyists, whose living depends on serving the commercial interests of their clients, take it very seriously indeed. Last week we saw why.

After an intense lobbying campaign, multinational pharmaceutical corporations were given the green light to patent human gene sequences by the parliament, amid angry demonstrations by Green MEPs waving the Jolly Roger to protest at "bio-piracy". The new European law on bio-genetics has been modified to meet initial concerns that led to an earlier bill being rejected three years ago.

"A harmonised legal framework will lead to increased research and development spending in biotechnology, to the benefit of Europe's economy and employment and medical patients," said the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries, welcoming the vote and claiming that a glorious and profitable future now loomed for the multi-billion euro industry.

The Green protesters say the law has not been revised enough despite the inclusion of a key provision that "the industrial application of a sequence or a partial sequence of a gene must be disclosed in the patent application". This was designed to stop genetic fishing expeditions, under which companies patent everything from human, animal and plant genes in the hope of hitting a financial jackpot. The complex European Union law is supposed to stop practices like those in the United States, where the genetic sequence of basmati rice has been patented to make Indian farmers pay royalties on their exports to the US.

Willi Rothley, the German social democrat who authored the new law, insisted that it would allow the patenting only of genuine inventions, not of discoveries of gene sequences that exist naturally.

"We have improved this directive, to make it very clear that there can be no use of human embryos for commercial or industrial purposes, no human cloning, and the suffering of genetically modified animals is only permitted for medical purposes," Rothley said after the vote.

He argued passionately that Europe could no longer afford the brain drain of its gene scientists to the more permissive US, nor could it abandon "the main hope of medical advance in the 21st century, the only glimmer of hope for many of our incurably ill". But the dismayed Green MEPs and other opponents of the new law said it was "a black hour for the European Parliament, failing to set clear ethical standards for a profit-oriented industry, and endangering human dignity, animal welfare and the genetic resources of the developing world".

Sierra Leone gangs take fearsome toll

Gary Younge in Freetown

AT THE Connaught Hospital in the centre of Freetown, as in Westminster, the talk is of arms and the brutal nature of politics in Sierra Leone. But here the concern is not focused on the military hardware sent in February by a British-based firm for use in ousting the military junta then in power in the West African country.

Nor does anyone care whether this broke a United Nations embargo on arms shipments to Sierra Leone, whose elected president the junta had overthrown last year.

People are more worried about the arms severed from civilians managing to flee the east of the country, where fighting goes on between supporters of the junta — ousted in February this year — and forces backing the restored president and government.

The two arms which were chopped from one man who wandered from village to village until he could find someone to drive him to the capital and the Connaught Hospital; the arm of the 60-year-old woman which was amputated by the rebels; the fathers whose arms were chopped off because they refused to rape their daughters.

In many respects these are the lucky ones, alive and for the time being, safe. From the fighting area they carry stories of summary executions, of women and children being rounded up, locked in houses and then burned alive. Many others are thought to be hiding in the forests.

This steady stream of human misery has been trickling to Freetown from the east over the past few weeks.

"It is feared that these wounded are just the visible part of the iceberg and that the number of wounded deeper in the country could be much higher," says the co-ordinator of Médecins sans Frontières, Monique Nagelkerke.

They are the human evidence that whatever else the British-based mercenary group, Sandline International, may have brought to the country three months ago it was not peace. While the democratically elected government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah has been put back in office, a vicious war goes on between Nigerian-led forces, which support the government, and soldiers from the junta ousted three months ago.

It is the Nigerian-led armies of the West African force Ecomog which have the upper hand. But guerrilla-style hit-and-run attacks from the rebels are prolonging the conflict indefinitely. And as they retreat they are leaving a legacy of terror.

Far from from Westminster's parliamentary committees, this is the bloody reality. With three coups in the past six years, Sierra Leone has been a playground for boys with guns. A nation that started its independent life 37 years ago in reasonably good shape is now one of the poorest in Africa.

Study any geological survey of the best defended rebel strongholds, and the motivation for much of this carnage becomes clear. In the east are some of the finest diamonds in the world, along with gold, titanium and bauxite.

These minerals need foreign capital if they are to be fully exploited. And while the diamond trade is not sentimental about democracy, it needs political stability. So when Major Johnny Paul Koroma's junta took power from President Kabbah with guns blazing in May 1997, and sent foreign engineers scuttling home, the trade got nervous.

As evidence grew that Major Koroma's men were digging up diamonds and selling them abroad so they could buy weapons, those in the diamond business knew something had to be done.

Follow the chain of diamond interests and you will arrive at the key players in the counter-coup that brought President Kabbah back to power in February this year.

British mercenaries gained a foothold in the country in 1996 when they were invited to advise a Canadian-based company called Diamondworks on security. It was Rakesh Saxena, an Indian financier with diamond interests, who first brought Sandline in.

When the current war is over, Nigeria may want its cut, too. But for the time being at least the people of Freetown seem happy to have their democracy back. If there is war still raging, at least it is the old junta that is on the run. If global interests have their sights on the diamonds, this cannot be any worse than the orgy of plundering by the rebels.

This sense of relief seems to have little to do with President Kabbah himself. Few people mention the head of state unless prompted, and even then do not appear to have much to say about him. But right now, at least there is the prospect of peaceful times to come.

All the fuss in Britain about arms being sent in support of President Kabbah's restoration, they say, is being raised by people who do not know the pain that Sierra Leone has been through. If they did, they would not pick diplomatic nits over who in British officialdom knew what, when, or about which UN resolution was violated in exporting arms to oust the junta.

There is no clean and above-board way, they argue, to deal with men who amputate and mutilate at whim. On Sierra Leone's radio and in the papers, there is nothing but swingeing criticism of the British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook.

When the weapons affair came into the open, Mr Cook was seen here as trying to deflect any blame on to Peter Penfold, Britain's high commissioner in Freetown.

Last week Freetown people took to the streets in support of Mr Penfold, who is back in London to face allegations that he colluded in breaking the UN arms embargo to help his friend President Kabbah back to power.

They insist that Mr Penfold acted to get the junta out while others dithered. He may lose his job, but he has gained a nation of admirers.

Sandline reprieved, page 9

Clinton pleads with unionists

John Mullin

PRESIDENT Clinton last weekend pleaded with undecided unionists to cast aside their doubts about the Good Friday agreement and back it wholeheartedly, as government worries increased about the gathering momentum of the No campaign ahead of this week's referendum.

New polls indicate what would be a nightmare outcome for Tony Blair: a Yes vote in Northern Ireland of around 60 per cent, masking a unionist majority against the deal. Nationalists are overwhelmingly backing it.

One fifth of unionists have not made up their minds, and they hold the key to a respectable winning margin. But the vast majority of don't knows have been flowing towards the No camp. Voters on both sides of the Irish border decide on Friday.

Against this background, dissident republican terrorists last weekend stepped up efforts to disrupt the campaign, but they failed in an effort to explode a car bomb outside the police station in Armagh.

A poll in the Daily Telegraph shows 61 per cent of people in Northern Ireland will vote Yes with 21 per cent of voters, including a large number of unionists, undecided. This is echoed in a poll of young voters jointly commissioned by the unionist News Letter and nationalist Irish News, which found that of those who have made up their mind about which way to vote, 66 per cent will say Yes.

But there were sharp differences. Among Catholics questioned 75 per cent are definitely saying Yes, compared with 25 per cent of Protestants.

Mr Clinton, attending the G8 summit with Tony Blair in Birmingham, said the deal safeguarded the principle of consent, sacrosanct to unionists. Everyone would win if it were endorsed, and he predicted that would mean massive investment into Northern Ireland.

Mr Clinton said that what united people in Northern Ireland was more important than what divided them. "Why take the risk that this moment will not present itself again for another generation?" He added: "It is a little bit of a leap of faith. But the risks of doing it are so much less than the risks of walking away."

Mr Blair repeated his assurance that Sinn Fein will be blocked from the power-sharing executive if the IRA fails to demonstrate the war is over for good.

The No lobby feels it is winning the campaign, although it admits outright victory is unlikely. Its objective is to secure a majority of unionists against the deal, which the Government fears could make the proposed institutions unworkable. It was boosted when Lord Molyneaux, David Trimble's predecessor as leader of the Ulster Unionists, said he was voting No. Coupled with Mr Blair's failure to woo the Soft No group led by Jeffrey Donaldson, one of six Ulster Unionist MPs opposed to the deal, it was seen as a serious blow to the Yes camp. Only four of 10 Ulster Unionist MPs back the deal.

Meanwhile the Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, said he would try to persuade the IRA to reveal the whereabouts of Northern Ireland's "disappeared" — up to 20 people abducted by terrorists, killed and secretly buried. His move came after the Government published a report on proposals to help bereaved and injured victims of the Troubles.

Referendum vote too close to call

Henry McDonald and Mary Holland

IN BELFAST'S Ulster Hall last week, the pony-tailed loyalist terrorist Michael Stone was clapped and cheered like a pop star by a crowd of 1,500.

Stone, who made international headlines for his one-man attack on an IRA funeral 10 years ago, was welcomed as a hero by the young working-class men in their 20s and 30s.

Earlier in the week, in the Royal Dublin Society's headquarters in Ballsbridge, an aged and more uncertain figure made his appearance. Hugh Doherty, one of the IRA Balcombe Street gang, who has served 22 years in British prisons, struck a stark contrast with the Sinn Fein leaders on the stage with their well-cut suits and glossy hairstyles.

The Balcombe Street gang too were cheered, although one of those present tried to defend the applause. "It was never meant to be for what they had done. It was because they'd survived and come home like prisoners returning after the war."

Whatever the motive, such images, seen on television, threaten hopes for a massive Yes vote in Friday's referendum. The release of prisoners convicted of savage crimes, albeit on a temporary basis, has caused anger and disgust, by no means exclusively among unionists.

It has also focused attention on the moral context in which the agreement is rooted. The early release of paramilitary prisoners, the decommissioning of illegal weapons, and the prospect of bringing former terrorists into government have provoked criticism of some aspects of the accord as "an outrageous moral fudge".

One of the most interesting aspects of the debate within unionism has been the fact that the No campaign has focused mainly on such peripheral elements in the agreement. According to every opinion poll since Good Friday, there is greater concern about the release of prisoners and decommissioning than whether or not the Union is safe. Such concerns are causing unionists who are most enthusiastic about the deal to worry about the slippage from the Yes to No camp.

Chris McGimpsey, an Ulster Unionist party Belfast city councillor, said his main concern is the opposition to the agreement within the ranks of organisations such as the Orange Order. McGimpsey, a liberal unionist, is worried that the referendum campaign has created deeper divisions within unionism than ever before. "I fear some people will never speak to each other again. The wounds within unionism will run deep," he said.

The No campaigners clearly capitalised on the Balcombe Street gang's appearance in Dublin. Within 24 hours they had put posters of armed terrorists up around Belfast and in the main unionist daily paper, the Ulster Newsletter, with a warning that the men in masks would soon be running Northern Ireland.

For law-abiding middle-class unionists undecided on how to vote, the sight of terrorists of any hue — Docherty or Stone — swaggering in front of television cameras, was too much. Peter Robinson, deputy leader of Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist party, warned voters that there could be hundreds more similar spectacles if the agreement is passed and the prison gates open.

Timothy Lemon, a young unionist professional from east Belfast, is typical of the waverers. Last week he was back in the Yes camp but still admits to having difficulties.

"I wouldn't be worried about the constitutional aspect of the agreement. It seems overall like a pro-union document with unionist consent built into it. But what worries people like me and many of my friends is that Sinn Fein-IRA will get into the Northern Ireland executive without giving up arms or calling off the war," he said.

He welcomed the intervention last week of the Prime Minister, who visited the province to try to assuage unionist fears. Tony Blair confirmed that parties aligned to paramilitary groups must establish democratic credentials. But despite Blair's assurances, the Yes unionists came under unrelenting fire throughout the week.

Different questions are being asked on the republican side: "What was it for, spending all those years in jail? Was it worth it?" Even more important: "Is the war over?"

The Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, knows that even now, when it seems that his party is united behind him, he has to move cautiously. There are dissident republican groups, many of whose members were formerly in the IRA or Sinn Fein, waiting in the wings.

His fear is that an issue such as the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons could blow up into a major obstacle and cause members of his own movement to lose faith in the Belfast accord and to defect, either to the Continuity IRA or, more likely, to the splinter group that has emerged calling itself "the real IRA". This is grouped around the leadership of a former quartermaster of the Provisional IRA. Its members, who have defected from that organisation, include experienced bomb-makers.

There is cause for real worry in the sheer amount of weaponry around — machine-guns, explosives, rifles, even ground-to-air missiles. Most of the weapons are under the control of the Provisional IRA, but that could change if there are defections to other groups.

Already these dissidents are known to have small amounts of explosives and other arms, as do the various loyalist extremists on the other side.

Set against this background, talk of the war being "finished, done with, gone" is still somewhat optimistic. Since the beginning of the current peace process in the mid-eighties, when men such as Adams and Martin McGuinness came to accept that the IRA could not win its objectives of a united Ireland by violence, both men have been driven by two imperatives.

The first has been to divert the republican movement away from violence and into politics; the second has been to do this without precipitating a split. That is why, all along, the Sinn Fein leadership has moved so cautiously, adjourning its annual conference until it could be sure of getting a Yes vote, and rejecting all talk of decommissioning, even though this enrages unionists and undermines Adams's claim that he wants to reach out to them.

Adams is determined to avoid a split in the republican movement if at all possible and, if not, to keep the dissidents to a minimum.

However, it is also clear that some within Sinn Fein have a second arm to their strategy: a strong No vote within the unionist community. Republican sources say the party is banking on unionists splitting down the middle, with possibly a slender majority voting No. Their hope is to see a weakened and divided unionism forced by ultras into wrecking the agreement, thus prompting the British government in London to press ahead unilaterally with its own programme of reforms and changes.

If this maps out to Sinn Fein's satisfaction, the unionist veto will be mortally wounded. From the outset the leader of the Ulster Unionists, David Trimble, has been aware that republicans wanted to see unionists outside the negotiations looking in. The republican game plan, according to Trimble's strategists, is to portray loyalists as intransigent and unable to accept even piecemeal changes — allowing Sinn Fein to argue that Britain must stand up to the unionists.

So there is still an unnerving degree of uncertainty on both sides in the smoke and flare of the referendum battle. Even Belfast's bookmakers say all bets are off this time.

One thing is certain: a huge No vote from the unionist community will have republicans running to cash in their political bets. — *The Observer*

Comment, page 14

Michael Stone, the loyalist terrorist who was granted four days parole, arriving at a rally in Belfast last week PHOTO: CRISPIN RODWELL

Hardline loyalist terrorists call ceasefire

THE hardline Loyalist Volunteer Force last week announced it was calling an unequivocal ceasefire with immediate effect. But it said it was urging voters to reject the Good Friday agreement, *writes John Mullin.*

The LVF, formed 18 months ago, was behind a dozen sectarian killings since the murder of its leader, Billy Wright, shot dead by the Irish National Liberation Army at the Maze Prison two days after Christmas.

The LVF said it wanted a clear period for people to make up their minds on the deal ahead of Friday's referendum.

There is no indication whether it will return to war if there is a Yes vote.

The announcement could be tactical. The LVF might be seeking to benefit from the effective amnesty which will see terrorists convicted of crimes committed before Good Friday released within two years as long as their organisations maintain the ceasefire.

That would make eligible for release the murderers of the lifelong Catholic and Protestant friends, Damien Trainor and Philip Allen, shot dead at Poyntzpass in March.

Mercenary firm escapes charges

Richard Norton-Taylor and Lucy Ward

FOREIGN Office officials waited a month after hearing allegations of sanctions-busting in Sierra Leone before alerting Customs & Excise, Parliament heard on Monday. It was also told that the mercenary firm, Sandline, will not face prosecution over alleged breaches of a United Nations arms embargo.

Announcing a two-man independent inquiry into the handling of the affair by the FO and other departments, the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, confirmed that officials had warned Sandline at a meeting in mid-January that sanctions covered arms supplies to all sides in the civil war in the West African republic.

Mr Cook, free to speak more fully about the affair now that the Customs investigation is over, told MPs that an official had restated details of the arms ban after Lt Col Tim Spicer of Sandline told them he had heard someone else was planning to run shipments of arms to Sierra Leone. He asked the legal position on the terms of the embargo, but did not suggest his own London-based firm had such plans.

Confirmation that the FO heard the claims at the January 19 meeting means that a month elapsed between first indications of planned sanctions-busting and the February meeting at which Customs were first notified of an alleged breach by Sandline.

The FO did not formally alert Customs by letter until March 10. Asked about the delay, a Foreign Office spokesman said: "If we knew all the answers to all these questions we would not have any investigation."

Sandline flatly denied Mr Cook's statement to the Commons.

The time-scale of events will form a core part of the independent inquiry, to be headed by Sir Thomas Legg, who retired last month as permanent secretary in the Lord Chancellor's department.

The task of the inquiry is to establish what government officials — including military personnel and the intelligence services — knew about plans to supply arms to Sierra Leone, whether any official encouragement or approval was given to such plans, and, if so, on what authority.

Mr Cook put up another combative performance in Monday's debate, as shadow foreign secretary Michael Howard failed to silence jeering Labour backbenchers with claims that the Foreign Office had become the setting for a "Whitehall farce".

The Liberal Democrat foreign affairs spokesman, Menzies Campbell, claimed that Customs' decision not to prosecute had become inevitable after the Prime Minister had dismissed the controversy as a "hoo-ha". He said: "The fact that there is to be no prosecution does not mean there was no breach of any embargo or of domestic criminal law."

Customs made clear that the warning to Sandline, delivered by Craig Murray, deputy head of the FO's Equatorial Africa Department, did not provide sufficient evidence to warrant a prosecution.

In Brief

THE Government confirmed that all blood plasma used in Britain is to be bought from the United States for the foreseeable future to avoid a small, "hypothetical" risk that supplies obtained in Britain could be contaminated with new variant CJD.

SPY Michael Bettaney, who was jailed for offering secrets to the Russians, has been released from prison after serving 14 years. Security chiefs fear he still knows the names of British agents working abroad.

THE Government has relaxed the age limits for donating blood in an effort to boost reserves. Half of Britain's blood banks are so poorly stocked they cannot be considered "safe".

SUZY HAGSTROM, a Californian who suffered a series of botched operations at a Guildford hospital after mistakenly being told that her unborn child had died, received £400,000 damages in the High Court.

THE RAF Chinook helicopter involved in the 1994 Mull of Kintyre crash did not have "fundamental flaws" in its design, a committee of MPs reported. The aircraft hit a mountain in thick fog killing all 29 people on board, including 25 Northern Ireland security experts.

FIVE men arrested but never convicted over the murder of Stephen Lawrence are fighting to avoid giving evidence at the public inquiry into the racist killing.

THE Diana memorial fund is taking legal action against the US firm Franklin Mint, the makers of an unofficial Diana "minesweeping" doll.

RADIOACTIVE radon gas, which seeps out of the ground, is responsible for about one in 20 deaths from lung cancer, scientists have established. Cornwall, Devon and parts of Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Somerset, are worst affected.

THE Government is facing a legal bill estimated at more than £1 million after abandoning proceedings against directors of Astra Holdings, an arms firm involved in the Iraq supergun affair.

KAREN MURRAY, aged 19, who died suddenly while on holiday in Corfu suffered a heart attack triggered by surgical material, including gauze and plastic clips, left inside her body several years ago.

QC's clichés let Cook off hook

PARLIAMENTARY SKETCH
Simon Hoggart

THE Foreign Secretary was tied to the tracks, and the train was heading his way! The tension was unbearable. Even Nicholas Soames just kept awake, by fanning his face.

But instead of being the Santa Fe Flyer, the engine turned out to be some wheezing, Rowland Emmett creation, with a kettle where the funnel should be, and a whiskery old driver brewing up as the train headed south at a gentle strolling speed.

So the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook — I will now abandon this over-extended metaphor — had plenty of time to break free. His opposite number, Michael Howard, was simply no good.

QCs are supposed to be brilliant at marshalling facts and persuading a jury, in the teeth of the evidence if necessary. After Monday's performance I would not want Mr Howard to defend me on a charge of taking the office paperclips home.

He wasn't helped by the fact that the Tory argument is on a very narrow matter: they want a High Court judge instead of a QC to head the inquiry in the Sierra Leone business.

I can't imagine anyone marching down from Jarrow in support of that, even with those embroidered old-fashioned banners: "Chums! Working Folk Cannot Support A Whitehall-Based Insider Lawyer Investigating A Matter Of Such Moment!", and accepting bowls of soup from local well-wishers.

No cliché was left unturned, no hackneyed phrase unstoned. The affair was "a Whitehall farce". "If it were not so serious, it would be laughable," he said, using a line which even prep school headmasters have, I suspect, long abandoned.

The Foreign Office was "a laughing stock around the world". (Really? Do stand-ups in the Kambodian Komedy Klub get yocks with every mention of Tony Lloyd?)

He invented his own fresh clichés, too. "He will be paving the way for a whitewash again!" he said. (Or priming the walls to put up a nice flagged pathway, perhaps.)

Not quite the worst moment was when he reminded the House that the Prime Minister had called the affair "an overblown hoo-ha". Mr Howard signalled his joke: "Who? is indeed the question. Hal is not a sufficient answer." "Groan" is what the happy Labour backbenchers did.

No, the worst moment came when he challenged Tony Lloyd, who is the Africa minister in the Foreign Office, on whether Sandline and its involvement had been discussed at two meetings.

"No," said Mr Lloyd. Now, as any good brief will tell you, it is a great mistake ever to ask a question, especially a question on which your case turns, if you don't already know the answer or have a ready riposte. Mr Howard had none, and Mr Lloyd scored his first triumph in what has been a disastrous month for him.

Mr Cook wasn't brilliant, but he didn't need to be. His line again was: we didn't help, but if the people of Sierra Leone like to think we did, who are we to disabuse them?

"They are delighted to be rid of a savage military regime which killed their sons and raped their daughters!" he shouted.

Why, Britain had even funded a radio station so that President Kabbah could speak directly to his people. Fine, just so long as they didn't send Chris Evans too.

He even delivered a mock-apology. "Last week I said that you [Mr Howard] had lost 13 cases in the courts while Home Secretary. I regret to inform the House that I had overlooked four cases, making a grand total of 17. And not once did he demand a public inquiry!"

Mr Howard sat smiling. Heaven knows why.

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Veterans plan to show emperor their disrespect

NEXT WEEK'S state visit to Britain by Emperor Akihito of Japan threatens to be nail-bitingly anxious both for the visitor and his hosts. The occasion is intended to reinforce relations between the two nations, but there are still many who refuse to forget or forgive the Japanese treatment of British prisoners during the second world war.

Veterans of the Japanese Labour Camps Survivors' Association are planning protests, such as turning their backs when the Emperor passes down The Mall with the Queen. She plans to honour her guest with the Order of the Garter, Britain's highest order of chivalry. In turn, she will receive the Grand Cordon of the Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum.

Although the Garter is in the Queen's personal gift, the exchange of honours was agreed only after talks between Buckingham Palace and the Prime Minister, who is keen to cement relations with a nation which has increased its investment in Britain by 20-fold in 20 years. The decision was not, apparently, to the liking of the Duke of Edinburgh, who was moved by protests from former Far East servicemen.

As a young first lieutenant in the Royal Navy, Prince Philip helped to transport some of the prisoners on the first leg of their journey home. The memory has stayed with him and, to mark the 50th anniversary of VJ Day in 1996, he pointedly chose to march with 5,000 members of the Burma Star Association.

But Prince Philip is clearly wrong if he expects Emperor Akihito to add anything to the recent roundabout expression of apology by the Japanese prime minister. The constitution insists that the emperor should never trespass into political matters.

A £1 MILLION study, the largest ever carried out on a cancer treatment drug, has found "conclusively" that administrating the drug tamoxifen to women immediately after surgery to remove a breast tumour doubles the chance that they will not suffer a recurrence of the disease.

Tamoxifen, developed in Britain 30 years ago, is already the most successful drug in the world for the treatment of breast cancer. But research published in the Lancet suggests that it could be twice as effective if doctors were to prescribe it routinely after surgery to remove a tumour.

The drug, which costs £200 for a recommended five-year course, is not routinely given to younger women or those who have received chemotherapy. The new evidence suggests that these women would benefit enormously from the drug.

The research, co-ordinated by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund at Oxford, concludes that if treated in this way, the death rate from breast cancer among women most at risk from the disease could be halved.

Washington Post, page 20

THE LANCET is a highly reputable journal whose reports of medical research are accepted without question. Its editors therefore responded indignantly to claims that its columns had been used by a "covert army of scientists" recruited by the tobacco company Philip Morris to counter unfavourable publicity about the effects of passive smoking.

The infiltration exercise, code-named Project Whitecoat, was described in a 1990 memorandum from a US law firm acting for the company, which has now released some 39,000 papers as part of a Minnesota lawsuit.

The documents, published on the Internet by a US congressional committee chairman, also claimed that the company had established its own "learned society" in Geneva, which published papers suggesting that factors other than tobacco smoke might be behind lung disease.

HERIOT-WATT, a middle-ranking Edinburgh university, was accused of awarding degrees to students who may have scored as little as 13 per cent in modular examinations to try to improve its pass rate.

The allegations were made in leaked internal documents suggesting that university staff lowered pass marks and "dumbed down" modules to allow less able students to get degrees.

A confidential 1996 memo by the then principal, Alistair MacFarlane, urged staff to take action to improve degree pass rates by 10 per cent after only 80 per cent of students completed their courses. His suggestion for giving an "instant boost" to results by altering syllabuses and assessment criteria was opposed by some lecturers, who complained that this would be unfair to conscientious students and potentially damaging to the university's reputation.





Chain gang . . . Teaming up to demand an end to unpayable Third World debt in Birmingham last weekend PHOTOGRAPH: LOUISA BULLER

Call for a fair deal

Luke Harding in Birmingham

IN THE grassy courtyard of Birmingham's St Philip's Cathedral, Steve Summers was holding aloft a giant pantomime camel, hired for the day from Northampton repertory theatre. Like thousands of others, he had come to Birmingham to form part of a giant human chain across the city.

"We thought the camel had a certain resonance," James Linell, his friend, explained. "You know — hot countries and debt."

Mr Linell was wearing a large, home-made sack. "My sack represents poverty," he said. "I was in Malawi last week and I was horrified to find I got 43 kwacha to the pound — 70 per cent more than last year. I thought, do we have no mercy for these people?"

Mr Linell and Mr Summers were protesting about international debt, along with 50,000 others. There were Christian groups, bishops, babies in rucksacks, two nuns who had joined the human chain outside the Hogshead Tavern, students, pensioners and middle-aged hippies. The Indian Workers Association of Derby was there; so too was the Rev Jeni Parsons, who had paddled 27 miles in a coracle along a Birmingham canal. Even Muhammad Ali sent a fax.

The only notable truants were Tony Blair and his colleagues at the nearby G8 summit.

"It's quite pathetic they are not here," said Chris Russell, a demonstrator from Oxford university. "Tony Blair should be here. He should at least give the impression he is listening."

The plan to encircle Birmingham's International Conference Centre, the venue of the summit, went ahead anyway though, in the end, the human chain was not a circle but more of a wonky parallelogram.

The crowds threaded their way for six miles along the Bull Ring, past the Cathedral Tavern and Hippodrome Theatre, and back to the Rotunda.

The demonstrators' plan was for everybody to link hands at 3pm and make a noise for two minutes. The noise went on for rather longer. A gigantic wave of sound walloped its way around the city. Church bells rang, people clapped and hollered. The young blew kazoos, the disabled shook rattles, and bus drivers honked their horns.

Clare Short, the International Development Secretary, said: "This demonstrates an end to the selfishness and greed of the 1980s and early 1990s."

The protesters from Jubilee 2000, an umbrella organisation of church groups, trade unions and charities, agreed.

In a last-minute about-turn, Mr Blair agreed to meet a protesters' delegation. Their message to him was simple: that the G8 nations should cancel the unpayable debt of the world's poorest nations by 2000. "I can assure you all leaders here fully share your concern," he said.

But later it emerged that Germany and Japan had held out against the debt cancellation plans. The G8 leaders had agreed to push forward an initiative to bring 20 countries into the debt reduction process by 2000.

"It is a whole lot of nothing," said Fiona Fox of Cafod: "Most people here are not interested in small-scale debt reduction. They want something more radical."

Dome plan to reduce world debt

Ewen MacAskill

THE Government is holding behind-the-scenes discussions with leading figures from banks, the churches and the arts to make the Millennium Dome the centrepiece of an ambitious multi-million pound project to reduce Third World debt.

The plan is to launch millennium bonds at the dome on January 2000, 24 hours after it is officially opened. The £1, £5 and £100 bonds will be offered to the public and companies to raise at least £750 million to help with debt cancellation. The project will end at the dome on December 31, 2000 when the bonds will be burnt on a giant bonfire.

The scheme, called the Bondfire Project, is the biggest effort yet to change the image of the dome, blunting criticism of it as a vacuous Disneyland exercise and instead linking it with a moral crusade. A Mori poll showed overwhelming support for marking the millennium through debt relief rather than building the dome.

The minister responsible for the dome, Peter Mandelson, is believed to support the scheme and to have sent it to other ministers for consideration. The International Development Secretary, Clare Short, is also thought to back it, though with some reservations about how the money will be spent.

The Treasury has sent out mixed signals. The initial reaction was to dismiss it as a stunt. But a source involved in lobbying the Treasury was optimistic that the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, will give his backing. "It is sensitive at the moment and is just about to crystallise. But it will go ahead, with or without government backing."

The proposal has powerful supporters, particularly Ken Costa, vice-chairman of merchant bankers Warburg Dillon Read and an evangelical Christian. The head of the Millennium Commission, Jenny Page, who is responsible for distributing Lottery money to the dome, also backs the scheme.

The dome would be used to sell and promote the bonds, which would also be available in supermarkets, schools and churches. The bonds would be burnt at a statue to be built at Meridian Point, on the Greenwich meridian.

The Liberal Democrat MP, Simon Hughes, said: "The dome is still controversial and still needs the big idea that Britain should be having for the millennium. Here is a chance to use the dome for something that is the most idealistic and practical of all the ideas put on the table for the millennium."

The millennium bond idea came from a Baptist minister, Steve Chalke, who founded the London-based charity, Oasis, which runs projects for the homeless in London as well as development projects in Brazil, India and Africa.

One reservation expressed by rival aid agencies is about how the money raised will be spent.

There are strong objections to the money going directly to the creditors, whether banks or governments. But the campaigners said this was one issue under discussion and there were ways round it.

Noam Chomsky, page 15

Britain top for single teenage mothers

Amelia Gentleman

BRITAIN has the highest level of unmarried teenage motherhood in the world, a study of women's sexuality in more than 50 countries has found.

Of the 41,700 children born to mothers aged 15-19 each year in Britain, 87 per cent were outside marriage. That compares with 62 per cent in the United States and 10 per cent in Japan.

The rate is the highest according to the study, which was collated from surveys in 53 developing and developed countries. It is also significantly higher than in most Third World countries.

The report — published last week by the International Planned Parenthood Federation — concludes that adolescent women worldwide need radically improved access to sex education. It calls for contraception services to be dramatically improved and concluded that up to 60 per cent of adolescent births worldwide are unplanned.

Roni Liyanage, the IPPF's youth officer, said poverty and a lack of education and employment opportunities were behind the trend in Britain. "As a result, adolescent women have low aspirations. There is also an inconsistency in the contraceptive services and sex education available to teenagers across the country. Sex education is not on the national curriculum, and when there are shortages this is one of the first things to go."

While conceding that Britain had a serious problem with teenage pregnancies, family planning organisations argued that the high level of unmarried teenage parents could be interpreted in a positive light.

The Brook Advisory Centre, the young persons' sex advice charity, said: "We are aware that Britain has a problem with unwanted teenage pregnancies — the most recent figures show that they rose by 11 per cent in 1996, which is very worrying. But the high level of unmarried teenage mothers suggests women are thinking hard before they get married rather than rushing into shotgun marriages. What these figures don't show is that very often both parents' names are on the birth certificate."

Researchers also indicated that a significant percentage of adolescent girls are being coerced into having sex against their will. In the US, 40 per cent of women who had sex before 15 said they were forced into it.

Women continue to be disadvantaged in their access to education, and the length of time they spend in school has a direct correlation to their sexual behaviour. In Britain, women who have had less than 11 years of schooling are four times more likely than those educated for longer to be married or cohabiting before they are 18.

The report argues that the world's 541 million young women aged between 10 and 19 form a crucial demographic force, soon to be the largest generation in history to make the transition from children to adults. Their childbearing behaviour will soon have a significant effect on global population.

But Ms Rosoff said the report did not paint a wholly bleak picture of their position.

"The condition of women is improving," she said. "Education is improving, and the age of marriage is increasing even in the most conservative countries. There is a general understanding that the development of a country does depend on the women's input."

Short attacks Amnesty view

Owen Bowcott

CLARE SHORT, the international development secretary, has attacked human rights pressure groups, including Amnesty International, for spending too much time "carping" over illegal arrests and torture while ignoring health, education and economic issues.

In a characteristically forthright intervention aimed at broadening public debate over Britain's relations with the Third World, Ms Short criticised the narrow focus of the human rights lobby.

Her comments, in an interview in Trade Union Alert, an Amnesty International magazine, will surprise charities set up to monitor extra-judicial killings and disappearances in developing countries.

"The discourse on human rights has got stuck in a denunciation of abuses of civil and political rights," Ms Short says. "While I think this is important, it is very carping and does not see human rights as work in progress.

"Most of the people who talk about protecting human rights, including Amnesty, have almost forgotten that the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right to a livelihood, to health care, to education and so on.

"We are in danger of slipping into thinking that human rights is all about people not being beaten up in police stations . . ." Ignoring poverty and talking only about political prisoners would, she warned, result in charities "losing an audience in a large chunk of the world". Ms Short has pledged to boost Britain's overseas aid budget and supports an international campaign to halve the number of poor people by 2015.

Some campaign groups share her concerns. The director of African Rights, Rakiya Omaar, said she sometimes felt embarrassed to say she worked on human rights. "The focus of human rights now . . . seems to have little to do with the complexity of problems in a poor country."

But Conor Foley, a senior member of Amnesty's campaigns team, said: "Amnesty supports all the rights contained within the Universal Declaration, both social and economic as well as civil and political.

"We are running a major campaign to promote the Universal Declaration. We believe that human rights are absolute, and reject arguments about cultural and political relativism."

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Voice of America

Frank Sinatra

THE CENTURY'S popular music is too vast to be embodied by one man, but Frank Sinatra, who has died aged 82, probably contained more of it than any other single figure. He was the first teenage idol, and the last of a line. He preceded Elvis and the Beatles, yet outlasted them. He began with Bing, and ended with Bono.

He bequeathed us definitive versions of some of the century's greatest songs: "What's New", "Angel Eyes", "I've Got You Under My Skin", "You Go To My Head", "Laura", "My One And Only Love", "My Funny Valentine" and a hundred others.

He was born in Hoboken, a small New Jersey port. Both his parents had been brought to the United States from Italy as children.

Francis Albert Sinatra left school at 16. Under the spell of Bing Crosby, he was singing in local clubs at the age of 17. In 1935 he became one of a vocal quartet which went on national tour. Then for two years he hustled, singing in neighbourhood social clubs and pestering music publishers, until in 1938 he auditioned for a job at the Rustic Cabin, a roadhouse in Alpine, New Jersey. For $15 a week he sang and waited on tables between performances, the bonus being a nightly radio broadcast to New York.

The trumpeter Harry James heard the show and "discovered" the singer for himself. "He'd sung only eight bars when I felt the hairs on my neck rising," James recollected. That night he offered Sinatra $75 a week to join his new band. In the same month that he joined the James orchestra Sinatra married Nancy Barbato.

Early in 1940, Tommy Dorsey made a bid for the singer's services. Dorsey's trombone-playing had been one of the principal influences on Sinatra's vocal style.

He was with Dorsey from 1940 to 1942, earning $150 a week. His first hit, "I'll Never Smile Again", was with the band, and thanks to exposure to radio and dance-hall audiences, and to his first feature films, the musicals Las Vegas Nights and Ship Ahoy, he was soon topping the polls in the music trade papers.

His efforts to enlist in the armed services after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 were thwarted by his punctured eardrum. But throughout the war he did what he could as a non-combatant, notably making efforts to publicise Nazi crimes against the Jews.

There are many colourful accounts of the circumstances surrounding Sinatra's escape from his contract with Dorsey, which gave the bandleader 43 per cent of the singer's earnings for life. One of them formed the basis of an episode in Mario Puzo's novel The Godfather, but according to the singer's own testimony it was not his Sicilian friends but his civilian lawyers who persuaded Dorsey to accept a settlement of $75,000.

An audience of delirious bobby-soxers greeted the launch of his solo career on December 30, 1942 at the Paramount Theatre, New York. Slim and debonair, Sinatra redefined the appeal of the male pop singer, consigning the competition to instant obsolescence. He was called the Lean Lark and the Sultan of Swoon; eventually these were distilled to an irreducible sobriquet: the Voice.

Within the space of a month, according to his daughter Nancy, his income rocketed from $750 to $25,000 a week; not long afterwards he moved from New Jersey to a house on Lake Toluca in southern California, with a 10ft-high fence to keep his fans at bay.

He was making some wonderful records. His own explanation for his popularity is probably the most acute: "It was the war years, and there was a great loneliness. I was the boy in every corner drugstore, the boy who'd gone off to war." Ella Fitzgerald captured the essence of his ability to get beneath the superficial design of a song: "It's always been just this little guy telling this story."

His movie career advanced in 1945 when he co-starred with Gene Kelly in Anchors Aweigh and appeared in The House I Live In, which carried a civil rights message. But in the aftermath of the war, when the shrinking economy was putting an end to the swing era, a slow decline began. The California state senate committee on un-American activities accused him of having "followed or appeased some of the Communist party line over a long period of time".

A columnist, probably tipped off by a government agency, revealed that he had been seen socialising with the mobster Lucky Luciano in Havana during a convention of the Mafia's "capi di tutti capi". His abrasive response to these and other stories antagonised many gossip columnists. What hurt more was that his vocal approach had been supplanted in the affections of teenage audience by the likes of Frankie Laine and Johnnie Ray.

His personal life, too, had slipped its moorings. There were affairs with actresses and singers, including Lana Turner. He was dancing with her one night in 1947 at a club in Palm Springs, California, when he met Ava Gardner, who was in the arms of the tycoon Howard Hughes.

'Ava Gardner was the greatest love of Frank Sinatra's life, and he lost her'

Two years later Sinatra and Gardner began an affair which culminated in their marriage in Philadelphia in November 1951, a week after his divorce from Nancy had been finalised. By the time they married, Gardner was already the bigger star of the two. This led to rows. The arranger Nelson Riddle said years later: "She was the greatest love of his life, and he lost her."

When they separated in 1953, his fortunes were at a nadir. His Columbia deal was over, and so, apparently, was his movie career. He signed with a new label, Capitol Records, on terms which clearly indicated the company's lack of confidence: this was a mere one-year contract, with no advance payment against future royalties.

He wanted to play the lead in On The Waterfront, but was beaten by Brando. So he pleaded with Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia Pictures, to give him the part of Angelo Maggio in Fred Zinneman's From Here To Eternity. The result was a best supporting actor Oscar in 1954, and a relaunched career.



Frank Sinatra . . . a giant of American popular music

His boyishness had gone. The figure slumped on a bar counter or leaning against a lamp-post on the covers of his new Capitol LPs was clearly a mature man. Wearing his new wardrobe of dark, single-breasted suits, white shirts and snap brim hats, he was in tune with an audience of young adults who were enjoying the prosperity of the Eisenhower era.

Between 1953 and 1960, he created a sequence of albums which remain definitive statements of 20th century American song. Songs For Swingin' Lovers and In The Wee Small Hours were followed in 1958 by Only The Lonely, an astonishingly complex and assured meditation on emotional loss.

In Hollywood Sinatra broadened his range by playing a heroin addict in The Man With The Golden Arm in 1955, followed by the successful musicals, Guys And Dolls (also 1955), High Society (1956) and Pal Joey (1957), and The Manchurian Candidate (1962). Thereafter, disappointingly, his filmography consisted of little more than action and adventure films.

He romanced Kim Novak, Marilyn Monroe, Lauren Bacall, Shirley Maclaine, Dorothy Provine, Jill St John, the heiress Gloria Vanderbilt, the dancer Juliet Prowse and many others.

He also gathered around him a group of male friends who became known as the Rat Pack — the singer Dean Martin, the entertainer Sammy Davis Jr, the actor Peter Lawford, and the comedian Joey Bishop.

At the dawn of the 1960s he left Capitol to form his own label, Reprise Records, in partnership with Warner Brothers. By this time he was rich, earning around $4 million a year, and powerful, with links to a variety of worlds, notably John F Kennedy's Camelot.

But his relationship with the White House cooled under the influence of Bobby Kennedy, the Attorney General, who was conducting a war on organised crime and felt that Sinatra's links with the gambling world could damage the administration.

In 1963 Sinatra's licence to operate the Cal-Neva Lodge, his $4 million casino hotel at Lake Tahoe, was taken away after the Nevada Gaming Commission uncovered his relationship with Sam Giancana, a Chicago mafia boss. The singer, the mobster and the president were said to have shared a mistress, Judith Campbell Exner. That was as close as anyone ever got to putting the finger on Sinatra's rumoured Mob connections.

The advent of the Beatles aged a lot of singers overnight. Sinatra responded with a bout of introspection, the 1965 album, September Of My Years. Yet only a few months later he married a 19-year-old actress, Mia Farrow, and demonstrated his continuing artistic virility by winning Grammy awards — the US music industry's Oscars. And at the end of the 1960s he had an even greater success with "My Way".

In March 1971 he announced his retirement. But no one was very surprised when he revoked his decision two years later. The remainder of his career gradually assumed the air of a 20-year farewell tour.

Politically he had long since transferred his allegiance to the Republican presidencies of Nixon, Bush and his old friend Reagan.

He remained on good terms with his former wives, particularly Nancy, the mother of his children, and was successfully married for a fourth and last time in 1976 to Barbara Marx, the former wife of Zeppo Marx.

The celebration of his 80th birthday had as its highlight an internationally televised party at which he was serenaded by the surviving giants of American popular music. The guest of honour chose not to sing. His work was done.

Richard Williams

Frank Sinatra, singer, actor; born December 12, 1915; died May 14, 1998

Fleet Street's Citizen Kane

Hugh Cudlipp

HUGH CUDLIPP did not invent tabloid newspapers, but they might well have been invented for him to preside over. His death at the age of 84 ends the direct lineage from Northcliffe's ½d Daily Mail at the turn of the century to the Daily Mirror which, at its peak, had a circulation of more than five million.

The Cudlipp name has been central to Fleet Street romanticism. Hugh was 24 when he became editor of the Sunday Pictorial (now Sunday Mirror) in 1937 and, even more remarkably, at one stage he and his two brothers, Percy and Reg, were effectively editors of different papers at the same time.

His genius was an extraordinary ability to translate the feelings, beliefs, prejudices, romantic aspirations and nostalgic dreams of the post-war masses into a common currency. The Mirror was a national institution just as much as the pre-Murdoch Times, and the forceful simplicity of its language was, in effect, the national idiom recognised across all class frontiers.

Yet Baron Cudlipp of Aldingbourne (in West Sussex) — he was given a life peerage by Harold Wilson in 1974 — was never formally editor of the Mirror, though no editor under his charge as editorial director or chairman had any illusions about his power. I knew of no one in my journalistic life who was more inventive, quicksilverish and creative of a unique approach to a story than Cudlipp. That was integrated with his genius, the tabloid genius of the century.

Hugh Kinsman Cudlipp was born in Cardiff. He left school at 14 and joined the Penarth News, then the Manchester Evening Chronicle and, in 1935 the Mirror as assistant features editor. He soon caught the eye of a young director of the group, Northcliffe's nephew, Cecil King. Theirs was to be a fascinating, immensely creative and successful relationship. Cudlipp spent most of the rest of his working life with the Mirror newspapers.

It was when he was chairman that he made probably his most serious error of judgment. He allowed Rupert Murdoch to buy the Sun. The immediate effect was to inject a competitive jungle atmosphere into the tabloid market from which it (and the Mirror) has never recovered.

It is quite possible that the age of the Mirror had passed and Cudlipp instinctively felt this. He retired at 60 and for the last few years of his life fought cancer with the courage and light-hearted dismissiveness that his friends and colleagues knew so well.

In 1945 Cudlipp married Eileen Ascroft, a journalist who died in 1962. A year later, he married Jodi Hyland, editor of women's magazines, who survives him. He had no children.

Geoffrey Goodman

Lord Cudlipp of Aldingbourne, journalist, born August 28, 1913; died May 17, 1998

Summit for nothing

THE annual meetings of the industrialised nations are part of a rudimentary system of governance for the planet. They allow the countries with the most money and economic capacity to try to reconcile interests — among themselves and between themselves and poorer countries — to coordinate policies at times of crisis, and, not least, to create a common rhetoric to project their agreements and to cover their differences. But the world is not an easy place to manage, as the G8 leaders were no doubt reflecting even as they issued their communiqués in Birmingham last weekend. The agenda was clear enough before the Indonesian demonstrations threatened President Suharto's position and before the Indians tested their bombs.

Both the social explosions and the nuclear explosions can be seen as the result of a failure of the world's powerful countries to do what they should have done years ago. They should have called for reforms in Indonesia, which the G8 now rather shamefacedly recommends, when Suharto was strong — not now, when he is weak and no longer of any use to his previous friends, who include most of the countries represented in Birmingham. The nuclear powers among them should have moved more rapidly on nuclear disarmament so that countries such as India would have less reason, or argument, for becoming nuclear weapons states. As it is, there is not much they can immediately do about either crisis. Indonesia will find its own way out of the Suharto era, and any reforms that matter will be for a new government to initiate. In South Asia, whether the Pakistanis can be persuaded not to test a bomb and the Indians to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty depends on the skill with which the United States and China handle the situation. Immediate collective sanctions against India, which it would have been possible to adopt at Birmingham, would certainly have been counter-productive. Sadly, the Pakistanis, who knew full well that such sanctions were not on the cards, will almost certainly use their absence to justify testing. What is true of India and Indonesia — that preventive action was not taken — is true also of Asia's more general economic troubles. World financial institutions implicitly admit that the unwise borrowing and investment that led to the Asian economic crisis need not have happened when they talk now of measures to make sure it does not happen again.

The most important decisions are those that head off future crisis rather than cope with crisis when it is upon us. That is why the G8 decision on debt relief is so disappointing. It should at least have matched the Mauritius Mandate in the aspiration to extend relief soon to two-thirds of poor countries. Instead, it puts the emphasis on what poor countries have to do to earn debt relief, is fuzzy on help for post-conflict states, and commits members of the G8 to no particular target. This argument is not over, but the G8 has missed an opportunity, at a time when Indonesia and India underline the principle that the most important quality in international politics is foresight.

The end nears for Suharto

AN ECONOMIC crisis marked by price riots, student demonstrations, and attacks on Chinese merchants, later followed by a terrible massacre of alleged communists, formed the chaotic background to President Suharto's rise to power in Indonesia more than 30 years ago. It would be ironic if a new economic crisis should be the catalyst for his fall. Indonesia could find itself in the cycle that brought down the Shah and his government in Iran. There, alternating efforts at suppression and liberalisation were equally unsuccessful, while the deaths and funerals of demonstrators kept on recharging the situation whenever it showed signs of quietening.

In Indonesia, as in Iran, the position of the army will be critical. At some point, if the protests continue and if soldiers are faced with the daily necessity of shooting their compatriots, they will begin to question whether a few more years for Suharto is worth that kind of price. The differences with Iran are also great. An Islamist regime of the kind which took over in Tehran is not in sight. In Iran the armed forces were shunted to one side after the revolution, while in Indonesia, the likelihood is that the army will retain its powerful position.

The Suharto regime belongs historically with the military regimes of Thailand, South Korea and the Marcos regime in the Philippines, all products of the cold war. Their inefficiency, corruption, repressive actions, and lack of understanding of how the societies over which they ruled had changed, led to their collapse. They are all now replaced by governments better and more democratic, if still far from ideal.

The United States, Britain, and some other Western countries have urged reform on Suharto. It is unlikely that reform can save him. His historical duty is to arrange his own exit in a way that helps his country and does not plunge it into violence or new problems. He asked Indonesians recently to put off all thought of reform for five years. But the argument over the succession has already begun. What is most important is that Indonesians do not stumble into their next 30 years in as bloody and ill-considered a way as they did into their past three decades. Some of the protests have taken the same racist form as they did during that crisis, with attacks on Chinese shopkeepers. Some protests may have been staged by the army in order to put pressure on the IMF to soften the measures it was urging on Indonesia. Within the armed forces officers with dubious ambitions are lurking, while among the opposition politicians there is ambition and inexperience. Suharto is almost certainly on his way out, but that is less important than who and what comes in his place.

Northern Ireland is hesitating

ALL THOSE who want peace in Northern Ireland have reason to feel a spasm of panic. An opinion poll in the Irish Times last week confirmed what had until now been just a hunch: that unionist support for the Good Friday agreement is slipping away at an alarming rate. The paper found that 45 per cent of Unionists plan to vote No in Friday's referendum — rising to 55 per cent when undecideds are excluded. Hostility to the accord among Northern Ireland's Protestants has almost doubled in the past month, while internal polls suggest previous "don't knows" now favour No over Yes at a rate of at least two to one.

This does not mean the referendum will be defeated. The survey shows the accord winning the overall backing of 56 per cent of the Ulster population — helped along by a recent surge of support among Catholic voters, now at the rock solid level of 87 per cent. There is a worrying trend here: nationalist approval for the Stormont deal is rising just as unionist support is plummeting. It is possible the referendum could pass with a majority of Catholic votes but a minority of Protestant ones. That would be a technical victory, but a political defeat. The entire point of the peace process has been to find a solution acceptable to both traditions of Northern Ireland.

The sudden outbreak of cold feet among unionists is not mysterious — and it is related to the rise in Catholic support. As the ultra-loyalist leader David Ervine says, Northern Ireland politics can be a zero-sum game: "If it's good for them, it must be bad for us."

Take the ecstatic reception granted to the Balcombe Street gang at Sinn Fein's special conference on May 10. The ovation for these convicted IRA terrorists chilled many a unionist heart. Pollsters say the fêting of the gang pushed as many as 10 per cent of the unionist community from Yes to No. The fact that their appearance had been made possible by the British and Irish governments entrenched the fear that the Good Friday agreement amounts to little more than an appeasement of terrorism.

The unity of Ian Paisley's No campaign and the division within the Ulster Unionist party have also had an effect. The Unionist leadership may now be paying the price for a failure to prepare its community earlier for an historic compromise. F W de Klerk in South Africa and Yitzhak Rabin in Israel both told their peoples that the time had come to give up what had once been dear, to make a sacrifice for the sake of peace. But David Trimble and others have instead sought to cast the Stormont deal as a chance to maintain the status quo.

Ultimately, it is a choice for Northern Ireland's unionists. It could not be plainer: the choice is war or peace.

Long, shameful road from Los Alamos

Martin Woollacott

MODERN Asia begins with the Bomb. Japan's war brought down the Western empires, while the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the climax of the effort which brought down Japan. The Asia we know was born of this double defeat. The phenomenon of atomic power, in its military and peaceful forms, immediately captured the attention of men like Jawaharlal Nehru, who helped set up a nuclear research committee as early as 1946, Mao Zedong, whose party and army were for years to wrestle with the problem of American and Russian nuclear might, and Kim Il-sung, who was to face the possibility that the American bomb might be used in North Korea.

The bomb's shock wave reached youngsters like Suharto, then a lieutenant in the Japanese-trained Indonesian defence forces, sending him rushing back to headquarters to confer with other officers on the future — a moment that could be seen as the beginning of the career that later brought him to power in Jakarta. Among its other myriad effects, it propelled the writer Laurens van der Post out of his prisoner-of-war camp in Java. He later noted that the savagery of the war, culminating in the final nuclear atrocity, should have created a psychological opportunity for reconciliation — between Westerners and Asians, and between Asians themselves.

If there ever was such an opportunity, it was missed, with the Western powers soon exerting themselves to resume control. That was a process which evolved into the struggle between communist and non-communist Asia and then, after Vietnam, into a more complex situation in which the United States and China enjoyed a degree of rapprochement, with the Soviet Union at the other corner of the triangle. Among the countries divided by the first phase of this struggle was Indonesia, where Suharto, now a general, emerged as the country's leader after the suppression of the communist movement and the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people.

The Asian struggle also brought fighting to Malaya, Cambodia, Laos and parts of Thailand, split Korea and Vietnam, set India against China in the 1960 war, and contributed to three bouts of Indo-Pakistani hostilities. And over most of these theatres loomed the bomb, which General Douglas MacArthur wanted to drop on the North Koreans and, if necessary, the Chinese and which the French wanted the Americans to drop on the Vietminh.

On the broadest canvas, the two recent Asian shocks — the Indian bombs and the Indonesian chaos — grow out of the same dangerous past, deriving from the two phases of confrontation that followed the Japanese defeat.

Stability is such a favoured word in Asia that it is easily forgotten how little there has been of it. Without these confrontations, especially after the Sino-American rapprochement, India would not be so preoccupied with achieving a nuclear balance with China. Without these confrontations, Suharto might never have come to power, or, if he had, might have stepped down at a much earlier stage — in 1978, for instance, when students and many others called for his departure as vigorously as they are doing today.

In a way, the first phase set him up, and the second, after Vietnam, tended to pull him down. The scholar of nationalism, Benedict Anderson, in an illuminating recent article in the London Review of Books, shows how the development of Southeast Asia was shaped by massive US war-making and intervention, intensive Japanese economic activity, an inward-looking China, and the energising effect of the Chinese diaspora. All these factors have changed. US interventionism and Japan's economic dynamism have diminished. China, now an outward-looking, export-driven nation, cannot avoid undercutting the Southeast Asian economies, even if it resists devaluation. Finally, the overseas Chinese entrepreneurs have been drawn, in Indonesia especially, into an alliance with the political élite whose disadvantages are now obvious for both sides. These changes would have undone the Asian "miracle" in Southeast Asia in time, even without the debt crisis of last year. Now they particularly threaten Indonesia, the only remaining unreconstructed regime from cold war days.

THE Asian miracle was one casualty of the strategic changes in the region. So is India's policy of nuclear restraint. The same shift in US priorities that undercut the "tough on communism" regimes of Asia also isolated India. The relationships between China and the US, and between both those countries and Pakistan, put India at a disadvantage. The US has made, and is making, efforts to persuade China to cease nuclear and missile aid and trade to Pakistan and Iran. But New Delhi still saw India as the only country with nuclear capacity that was not receiving technical help from an outside power. Previous governments came close to testing. Then came the arrival to power of the Bharatiya Janata party, with its strong nuclear rhetoric. And so Indian scientists and soldiers went down what is now, 2,000 tests after Los Alamos, a familiar and unavoidably shameful road.

Those men on the spot no doubt experienced the same mixture of triumph and unease felt by the men who first exploded a nuclear bomb. Elated by what they had achieved, they were also fearful of it. Robert Oppenheimer, the chief scientist of the second world war nuclear effort, famously found quotations from the Bhagavad-Gita to express his feelings when the first bomb was tested. One was: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." The other was: "The good deeds a man has done before defend him."

The Indians would prefer the latter thought, appealing to their history of nuclear restraint to excuse last week's decision, which they insist on seeing in the narrow frame of national security. What they do not yet see is that the present emergencies in Asia spring out of a past in which war, nuclear manoeuvres, economic growth, and political choices were dangerously intermingled, as they still are today.

The poor always pay debts of the rich

Noam Chomsky on the one-sided history of debt 'forgiveness'

THE CURRENT call for international debt cancellation is welcome, but debt does not just go away. Someone pays, and history generally confirms what a rational look at the structure of power would suggest: risks tend to be socialised, just as costs commonly are, in the system mislabelled "free enterprise capitalism".

The old-fashioned idea is that responsibility falls upon those who borrow and lend. Money was not borrowed by *campesinos*, assembly plant workers, or slum-dwellers. The mass of the population gained little from borrowing, indeed often suffered grievously from its effects. But they are the ones who bear the burdens of repayment, along with taxpayers in the West — not the banks who made bad loans or the economic and military élites who enriched themselves while transferring wealth abroad and taking over the resources of their own countries.

The Latin American debt that reached crisis levels from 1982 would have been sharply reduced by the return of "flight capital" — in some cases, overcome, though all figures are dubious for these secret and often illegal operations. The World Bank estimated that Venezuela's flight capital exceeded its foreign debt by 40 per cent in 1987.

In 1980-82, flight capital reached 70 per cent of borrowing for eight leading debtors, according to estimates. That is a regular pre-collapse phenomenon, which we saw again in Mexico in 1994.

The current International Monetary Fund "rescue package" for Indonesia approximates the estimated wealth of the Suharto family. One Indonesian economist estimates that 95 per cent of the country's foreign debt of some $80 billion is owed by 50 individuals, not the 200 million who end up suffering the costs.

Debt can be and has in the past been cancelled. When Britain, France and Italy defaulted on debts to the United States in the 1930s, Washington "forgave (or forgot)" as the Wall Street Journal reported. When the US took over Cuba 100 years ago it cancelled Cuba's debt to Spain on the grounds that the burden was "imposed upon the people of Cuba without their consent and by force of arms". Such debts were later called "odious debt" by legal scholarship, "not an obligation for the nation" but the "debt of the power that has incurred it", while the creditors who "have committed a hostile act with regard to the people" can expect no payment from the victims.

When Britain challenged Costa Rica's attempts to cancel the debt of the former dictator to the Royal Bank of Canada, the arbitrator — US Supreme Court Chief Justice William Howard Taft — concluded that the Bank lent the money for no legitimate use, so its claim for payment must fail. The logic extends readily to much of today's debt.

In the 1970s, the World Bank actively promoted borrowing. "There is no general problem of developing countries being able to service debt," the Bank announced authoritatively in 1978.

Weeks before Mexico defaulted in 1982 a joint publication of the IMF and the World Bank declared that "there is still considerable scope for sustained additional borrowing to increase productive capacity".

The record continues to the present. Mexico was hailed as a free market triumph and a model for others until its economy collapsed in December 1994, with tragic consequences for most Mexicans.

Shortly before the Asian financial crisis erupted in 1997, the World Bank and IMF praised the "sound macroeconomic policies" and enviable fiscal record of Thailand and South Korea.

A 1997 World Bank report singled out the "particularly intense" progress of "the most dynamic emerging [capital] markets," namely Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand, with Indonesia and the Philippines not far behind. The report appeared as the fairy tales collapsed.

Failure of prediction is no sin, but it is hard to overlook the argument that economist Paul Krugman put: "Bad ideas flourish because they are in the interest of powerful groups."

Over the centuries, free market theory has been double-edged: market discipline is just fine for the poor and defenceless, but the rich and powerful take shelter under the wings of the nanny state.

Another factor in the debt crisis was the liberalisation of financial flows from the early 1970s. The post-war Bretton Woods system, designed by the US and UK to liberalise trade while regulating capital movements, was dismantled by the Nixon administration. This was a major factor in the enormous explosion of capital flows in the years that followed. In 1970, 90 per cent of transactions were related to trade and long-term investment, the rest were speculative. By 1995 it was estimated that 95 per cent of transactions were speculative, most of them very short-term (80 per cent with a return time of a week or less).

Markets have become more volatile, with more frequent crises. For the past 25 years, growth and productivity rates have declined significantly. In the US, wages and income have stagnated or declined for the majority while the top few per cent have gained enormously. By now the US has the worst record among the industrial countries by standard social indicators. England follows closely, and similar though less extreme effects can be found throughout the OECD.

The effects have been far more grim in the Third World. Comparison of East Asia with Latin America is illuminating. Latin America has the world's worst record for inequality, East Asia ranks among the best.

Debt is a social and ideological construct, not a simple economic fact. Furthermore, liberalisation of capital flow serves as a powerful weapon against social justice and democracy. Recent policy decisions are choices by the powerful, based on perceived self-interest, not mysterious economic laws.

G8 fiddles while Jakarta burns

OPINION
Larry Elliot

ANYBODY who wants to know why the Bank of England may yet put up interest rates should have been in Birmingham last weekend. The strong pound may be hurting the factories in the metal-bashing capital of Britain, but the bars and restaurants of the city centre are booming.

This dualism — between the strong and the weak, between what you see and what you don't — is by no means confined to Brum. Take the whole G8 process, for example. The abiding visual image of the weekend was of Bill Clinton sitting on the balcony of a canal-side pub supping a pint of Greenall's bitter.

Nothing so memorable came out of the summit itself, which was the usual round of windy rhetoric, pre-cooked fudge and unspoken disagreements.

Had he been pressed by his fellow drinkers in the Malt House, Mr Clinton would no doubt have said that the world economy is robust. Again, he would have been half right. His own country is enjoying an industrial renaissance, while faster growth in the European economy is at last starting to make a dent — albeit small — in unemployment. Britain, on an optimistic assessment, has found the magic elixir of non-inflationary growth. Free-market reforms will do the trick for Russia, and Japan's recession will end once the impact of the latest fiscal boost kicks in.

But there is another way of looking at the current state of the world. Instead of taking the G8 — the West's most powerful economies — let's look at the P5 — the world's most populous nations.

Starting in reverse order, we have Indonesia, a country of 200 million which is apparently about to go up in flames. Economic collapse in Indonesia could push the fragile Japanese banking system — heavily exposed there — over the brink. And, if the crisis continues to have an ethnic dimension, with pogroms against ethnic Chinese, can the West expect Beijing to stand idly by? It is not hard to see why the West feels slightly uneasy about what is happening in Indonesia. President Suharto has been in power more than 30 years, yet only now has the G8 decided he is actually a bit of a cad — too late for the people of East Timor, killed with weapons sold by the West.

Then there is Russia, the subject of an experiment in shock-treatment free-market economics over the past 10 years. Normally, scientists testing new drugs try them out on small, carefully-selected samples; they would be wary of turning a fully-fledged nuclear power led by an ailing drunk into laboratory mice. The result is a Third World economy with the mafia in charge.

The United States, the third most-populous country is doing better. Even its detractors would have to agree it has a First World economy. They would add, however, that this is poised precariously on a Third World society.

Then we come to the Big Two. Nuclear proliferation in the Indian sub-continent seems unlikely to add to the stability of the global system. But India believes — rightly — that its voice is not being heard in such forums as the World Trade Organisation where, despite all the free-trade talk, mercantilist deals are stitched up between Washington and Brussels, then presented to other countries as a *fait accompli*. We shall see whether WTO ministers pay any more respect to the delegation from New Delhi now.

Finally, of course, there is China, which has resisted a devaluation that would send tremors through the rest of Asia and beyond, but may not be able to do so for much longer. When you are a dictatorship governing more than a billion people you need to deliver the rising living standards that export-led growth can bring to quell demands for greater political freedom.

China is facing intense competition from those neighbouring countries which have seen their currencies depreciate by 50 per cent or more. It is poised on the brink of a devaluation that could send shudders across Asia and beyond.

The global economy is at a crossroads. The world may be on the verge of a long upswing to match that of the post-war golden era, with the full application of new technology leading to higher growth and increasing competition keeping inflation low. But it is also possible we could be on the brink of something much nastier; a full-scale global economic crash, triggered by Asia.



Asian crisis . . . A policeman hits a looter in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, with the butt of his rifle PHOTOGRAPH: ACHMAD IBRAHIM

Some will say a financial meltdown would be no bad thing. Devotees of Joseph Schumpeter's waves of creative destruction would argue that out of the ashes will emerge a better global economic system, just as there would have been no golden age without the Depression, Hitler and the second world war.

Prevention being better than cure, it might be better to put some reforms in place now. But is this likely?

The G8 can see the point of intervening against international drugs smugglers and to prevent illegal immigration. Some of its more progressive members can see the point of intervening in the labour market to subsidise jobs: still others can see the point of intervening to reduce the burden of debt for the poorest nations. The communitarians, and their close friends the social authoritarians, can see the point in intervening to force people to behave better but, unfortunately, as yet none of the G8 members can see any point in intervening to make capital behave better.

This is the crux of the matter. Attacking what they describe as the "Wall Street-Treasury-IMF complex" in the latest New Left Review, Robert Wade and Frank Veneroso say: "We now have in place a powerful phalanx of international organisations and multinational corporations devoted to maximising the freedom of financial capital around the world. The question is what institutional muscle can be brought to bear by those convinced that such untrammelled freedom is even more dangerous for human welfare today than it has been in the past."

Their message is that, unless capital is managed properly, we can expect financial crises to arrive with increasing regularity. Some in the World Bank and the IMF privately share their views, and would probably be more vociferous, given the right lead from the G8.

But all we can glean from the talk of intervention is that governments have decided there is *an* alternative to sitting in the middle of the road, like frightened rabbits trapped in the headlights of the globalisation juggernaut. We don't know whether the G8 is prepared to clamber into the cab and put its foot on the brake.

In Brief

GEORGE Soros, the international financier, could make $2 billion from a bet on sterling falling in value, following a recent strategy that involved buying the pound close to its recent highs against the German mark and then instigating a series of trades using options.

CHRISTIE'S, the world's largest and oldest fine art auction house, has been sold to French businessman François Pinault for $1.2 billion.

TOP executives at US car giant Chrysler will earn up to $1 billion if the merger with Daimler-Benz is approved. They will be able to use their options to buy shares in the merged group almost immediately, according to the Securities and Exchange Commission.

MEMBERS of Britain's Royal Automobile Club may take legal action to force the motoring organisation to extend its windfall payouts to overseas subscribers. The move follows the RAC's decision to sell its breakdown and driving school operations for $730 million.

THE US Justice Department set out to block the $1.1 billion merger between Primestar, a television consortium, and Rupert Murdoch's direct broadcast satellite businesses. The suit alleged the transaction would allow five of the largest cable companies to protect their legal monopolies.

A BIDDING war has broken out for PolyGram, the world's largest record company, with front-runner Seagram, the drinks and entertainment group, ranged against two US leveraged buy-out funds.

PEARSON, a diversified British media and entertainment company, won a bidding contest for Simon & Schuster's educational and reference publishing division, paying $4.6 billion in the largest deal yet in the book business. Pearson shares immediately shot up by 9 per cent.

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates May 18	Sterling rates May 11
Australia	2.6098-2.6157	2.5669-2.5709
Austria	20.40-20.42	20.37-20.39
Belgium	59.83-59.94	59.70-59.80
Canada	2.3544-2.3566	2.3351-2.3380
Denmark	11.04-11.05	11.03-11.04
France	9.724-9.736	9.707-9.718
Germany	2.8994-2.9022	2.8952-2.8980
Hong Kong	12.56-12.57	12.63-12.64
Ireland	1.1509-1.1535	1.1501-1.1524
Italy	2,858-2,862	2,854-2,858
Japan	220.52-220.82	218.25-218.51
Netherlands	3.2672-3.2702	3.2624-3.2653
New Zealand	3.0426-3.0465	3.0157-3.0216
Norway	12.19-12.20	12.10-12.11
Portugal	297.17-297.51	296.67-297.02
Spain	246.31-246.51	245.82-246.29
Sweden	12.63-12.65	12.42-12.44
Switzerland	2.4126-2.4127	2.4173-2.4204
USA	1.6208-1.6218	1.6300-1.6316
ECU	1.4714-1.4733	1.4705-1.4723

FTSE100 Share Index down 302.1 at [illegible]. FTSE 250 Index up 20.1 at 5792.5. Gold down $0.25 at [illegible].

Scandinavia's itch may make Cuba sore

Anthony Browne

FIDEL Castro's plans to revive Cuba's economy are being jeopardised . . . by the sensitive skins of the Scandinavians.

Last week the price of Cuba's second-biggest export, nickel, fell by 10 per cent as a delayed consequence of Swedish and Finnish protests that they are allergic to the metal.

At the root of this tale is the advent of the euro. Commodity traders fear the nickel market will be flooded because the switch to the new currency will leave governments around Europe with tens of thousands of tonnes of the metal.

Eight out of 10 European coins currently contain nickel. But plans by the European Commission to use nickel for euro coins had to be abandoned after the Swedish government claimed that using the metal would bring their citizens out in a rash. After intense lobbying, the Commission agreed that the nickel in euro coins should be replaced with an alloy called Nordic gold — produced mainly (surprise, surprise) in Scandinavia.

The 11 governments which formally committed themselves to the single currency this month will need to produce more than 70 billion euro coins, using 350,000 tonnes of metal. The coins will not be in circulation until 2002, but the unprecedented scale of the operation means national mints are starting production immediately.

Coins of countries' old currencies will be recycled, but governments will be left with a huge surplus of nickel which cannot be reused.

German coin producer Vereinigte Deutsche Nickelwerke, which has set up the Euro Coin Recycling Centre, said last week that it calculated there would be up to 100,000 tonnes of surplus nickel — more than a tenth of global annual production.

Lawrence Eagles, commodities analyst at GNI, said: "That's a very high proportion of the market. This news is the straw that broke the camel's back." The price of nickel fell sharply last week, from more than $5,400 a tonne to less than $5,000, its lowest level for five years. Governments have promised to try to limit any further impact on the market by releasing the recycled nickel over a long period.

The collapse of the nickel price will fall particularly hard on Cuba, which along with Russia and Canada is one of the world's leading suppliers.

Cuba has been desperately trying to stave off economic collapse by building up its exports of nickel. In the first four months of this year, it sold around 45,000 tonnes, bringing in around a quarter of a billion dollars of hard currency. — *The Observer*

Uzbekistan makes up with the Kremlin

Sophie Shihab in Moscow

ONLY last year the president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov (one of six Muslim heads of state in the former Soviet republics), was busily setting himself up as a champion of resistance against "Russian imperialism" in Central Asia and cuddling up to Nato.

But Karimov — a former party apparatchik who once remarked that "democracy, like communism, is nothing but a myth" — has been forced by Uzbekistan's domestic and regional problems to adopt a more conciliatory approach towards the Kremlin.

"A turning point has been reached in our relations," Karimov declared on his return from Moscow on May 8. During his trip, he waxed so enthusiastic about Uzbekistan's "old relationship of co-operation" with the Kremlin that he persuaded the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, to announce the creation of a new troika within the moribund Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The troika, which comes in the wake of the Russia-Belarus "union", the four-nation customs union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan, and the "anti-Russian" alliance of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (Guam), is made up of Russia, Uzbekistan and its war-torn little neighbour, Tajikistan.

Karimov said it would "oppose the fundamentalism backed by leading Islamic states that want to set up another such state in Tajikistan". Yeltsin went one better by adding that it would have "a strategic and economic content" so as to face up to "the real ideological threat from the south".

President Islam Karimov . . . forced to seek Russian help

In other words, the Russian president promised his opposite number that he would help him out if "Islamists" — whether Uzbek, Tajik or Afghan — were to threaten his regime.

With the advance of the Taliban to the Uzbek border in 1997 and the continued fighting in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Karimov realised the only country that would spring to his aid was Russia. The Western powers — and particularly the United States — have for years persisted in making their offers of help conditional on a greater degree of democracy.

During a visit to Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, on April 20, Bronislaw Geremek, the Polish president of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), delivered a similar message, with minor variations: in the course of a "frank" one-to-one discussion with Karimov, he talked less of "human rights" than of "stability", a key word in the Uzbek president's vocabulary.

Geremek also made the point that many governments dealing with political Islamism have merely aggravated the problem by resorting to purely repressive policies.

In a now familiar sequence of events, when Karimov "eradicated" Uzbekistan's secular opposition of democrats and nationalists, he gave free rein to the more popular Islamist opposition. This has always proved difficult to counter in rural areas, particularly in the overpopulated valley of Ferghana.

But Geremek's lecture was in vain: 10 days later, Karimov told the Uzbek parliament that "Muslim activists are so dangerous they need to be shot in the head. And if you don't dare, I'll do it myself." He got parliament to adopt a stiffer version of a law on religion.

He inveighed against "the civil service chiefs who spend more time building mosques than schools", and claimed that the "Wahabis" — Soviet propaganda code for Islamic opposition members — planned to poison wells, murder civil servants, sabotage factories and plunge the country into a civil war like the one that ravaged Tajikistan. Their aim, he said, was to rebuild an Islamist stronghold in the Ferghana valley.

The murder of several policemen in that region last winter, which may have been politically motivated but could just as easily have been the work of local mafias, triggered a wave of fresh arrests and the "disappearance" of prominent Islamist activists.

Like many Uzbeks, Karimov fears the possible consequences of the "peace process" that got under way last summer in Tajikistan without his backing.

There is *nothing irreversible* about the process: the bringing into the political fold of armed opposition Islamists on their return from exile in Afghanistan has so far prompted sporadic clashes between them and government forces, which threaten to spill over into Uzbekistan, where there is a large Tajik minority.

Karimov was delighted when Yeltsin telephoned the Tajik president in his presence to inform him that his country now formed part of an "anti-Islamist troika". It is not clear how Russia stands to gain from fanning the flames of the conflict in Tajikistan, when — with the United Nations — it is supposed to be the official broker of the peace process.

But the Russian press has come up with an explanation: one of the keys to the rapprochement between Russia and Uzbekistan is the fact that the new executive secretary of the CIS, the powerful Russian financier Boris Berezovsky, has every interest in its taking place. If he has promised to bring down customs barriers, so the argument runs, it is because he will personally benefit from the move.

The omnipresent Berezovsky, to whom Karimov paid a vibrant tribute, has acquired exclusive rights for the sale in Russia of cars built in the Ferghana valley by the South Korean company, Daewoo, the leading foreign investor in Uzbekistan.

The setting up of the troika may also solve a major problem facing Daewoo — the low demand for cars in Uzbekistan, a country where Karimov has decided to impose a free-market economy, even if it entails wildly fluctuating exchange rates, galloping corruption, police-state methods and other ingredients that act make it an ideal breeding-ground for Islamist ideas.

(May 13)

France cracks down on Corsican patronage

EDITORIAL

THE French tax inspectorate's recent report on Corsica's leading bank, Crédit Agricole, represents a milestone in the history of Corsica. It is the first tangible proof that the government has changed its approach to the Corsican problem. Until recently, the rule that applied to the island was that it constituted an exception. To varying degrees, all French governments have acted as if Corsica did not really form part of the republic and required special treatment that somehow dispensed it from having to obey the rule of law.

There is nothing wrong with the principle of that attitude: the European Commission accepts that islands merit suitable support policies. In Corsica's case, there is also the question of its grim historical legacy. Excesses committed by the nationalist movement should not be allowed to obscure the past in such a way as to give "continental" France an easy conscience: it is a fact that Corsica was oppressed, and its culture and traditions repudiated.

Even so, the specific measures justified by Corsica's island status and past should not be allowed to foster a system of patronage. Unfortunately, that is precisely what has happened.

Symptomatic of that process was the rather unusual type of "free zone" introduced by the previous government. Such a system of wholesale tax exemption is normally intended to attract outside investors, thus boosting economic activity and employment. But precisely the reverse happened in Corsica. Tax relief was restricted to Corsicans alone. Instead of giving them economic aid, the government was simply granting them preferential treatment once again.

The fact that members of a major state inspectorate have managed to bring to light a grotesque degree of mismanagement by the local branch of a leading French bank marks a sea change. As far as Corsica is concerned, it is undoubtedly the best thing that could have happened — economic aid can never be effective if it disappears into the sands of parallel networks.

Yet not all the cases of abuse, fraud and bending of regulations revealed by the inspectorate are of equal gravity. There is a big difference between, say, aid that is allocated to a nationalist farmer and a deliberately organised system of misappropriation. The courts, when they come to examine such cases, will have to act with discernment. It would be a mistake to go from one extreme to the other, from widespread laxity to universal suspicion: not all the aid that Corsican farmers receive is illegitimate.

Even before the prefect of Corsica, Claude Erignac, was gunned down in February, the government had promised it would embark on a new Corsica policy whose precondition would be a return to the rule of law. With the tax inspectorate's report, it has begun to provide itself with the teeth to do so. It has also instructed civil servants to make sure that regulations are respected in Corsica as they are elsewhere.

But it is not enough merely to restore the state's self-respect and re-establish the rules of normal public life: the government must still come up with the economic package that the island needs if it is to be able to kick its bad old habits.

(May 12)



On the streets . . . Polish prostitutes in Hamburg

PHOTOGRAPH: KEVIN WEAVER

Prostitution takes a turn for the West

Slav women are being sexually exploited by networks and gangs, writes **Roland-Pierre Paringaux**

IN 1996, 18-year-old Irina K. came across an alluring small ad in a Kiev newspaper: an association was looking for female candidates to go on a training course in Berlin to learn interpreting, with a guaranteed job at the end of the day.

Like many Ukrainian women of her age, she had few prospects in a country where social deprivation and female unemployment have reached record levels. She also desperately needed money to support her two-year-old child, whose father had done a vanishing act, and her grandmother, who had brought her up. Irina unhesitatingly signed up.

Two days later, armed with a fake passport and dreams of an European Eldorado, she took a train with another woman who had answered the same ad. During the journey they told each other scare stories about kidnapped women. When they arrived in Berlin, the German who met them said there had been a change of plan: the interpreting school had closed down and they would have to look for work elsewhere. Luckily he knew someone in Belgium . . .

When they got to Brussels, he took them to a hookers' bar near the Gare du Nord. When the two Ukrainians expressed surprise, their minder did not beat about the bush: his network had taken a big risk and their journey had cost a lot. To cover his expenses, he would have to "entrust" them to bar owners in Brussels and Antwerp for a fee of $10,000 each. It was up to them to repay their debt by prostituting themselves.

The women refused, but it was too late. The trap had suddenly closed on them: their passports had been confiscated, and for several days they were raped, beaten and threatened with reprisals.

Irina gave in. But she prostitited herself with such bad grace that the bar owner ended up selling her to a Belgian pimp who operated in Rue d'Aarschot, in Brussels' red light district. The street is lined with windows behind which hundreds of prostitutes from eastern Europe, Albania, Thailand and Zaire exhibit their charms 12 hours a day and seven days a week. They are forced to hand over part of their earnings to pimps. They are often roughed up.

A police check eventually enabled Irina to escape from hell. She was arrested because she had no identity papers. A medical examination revealed cigarette burns all over her body. The police encouraged the young woman to lodge a complaint against the pimp who had tortured her and testify against the network that had exploited her.

She agreed to do so — which is rare. Kept at a secret location during investigations, she regularised her situation with the authorities. She now hopes to settle in Brussels and bring her small son there from Ukraine. She has started a training course — in interpreting.

Apart from its rather unusual happy end, Irina's story illustrates a fast-growing form of criminal activity: the sexual exploitation in western Europe of women from former Soviet-bloc countries. The business — a combination of illegal immigration, slavery, sexual exploitation and organised crime — is believed to involve several hundreds of thousands of women each year.

Like Irina, they all flee poverty and dream of a better life in the West. The collapse of communist regimes has created the conditions that make such a dream possible. Although the European Union (EU) has stiffened its immigration legislation, the demands of the sex industry have not diminished. This creates an ideal situation for traffickers and pimps, who force their victims to break the law and are thus able to obtain a hold over them.

Not all candidates are as naive as Irina. Many realise that "top model" often means call-girl, and that "waitress", "au pair", "escort girl" and "dancer" are synonyms of prostitute. What they do not expect is to be treated virtually like slaves.

Young women from eastern Europe offer many advantages and are easily placed. Often beautiful blondes, they are mostly docile and well-educated. As they come from nearby countries, they cost less to feed into the system than women from Asia or Latin America. An ordinary three-month tourist visa acts as an Open Sesame. Thousands of them have become sexual nomads, drifting from one country to another as they obtain visas.

Statistics are unreliable, but the general trend is clear. According to the International Organisation for Migration, some 500,000 women from central and eastern Europe prostitute themselves in EU countries. In some countries they have cornered up to 75 per cent of the market within only a few years. The women concerned are getting younger and younger; some Albanian girls, who are numerous in Italy, are only 14 or 15. Their arrival on the scene has caused prices to plummet.

THE prostitution networks, which are run mostly by Russians, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs, Turks and Albanians, generate huge profits. They cream off several thousand dollars per woman at each stage of her odyssey (passport, journey, placement).

German police say that during the three months they have a tourist visa prostitutes have to hand over about $20,000 to middlemen. Earnings are even higher in Japan, where women from eastern Europe now compete with Thai and Filipina women, who are regarded as less exotic.

"There's a lot of talk about drugs, but it's the white slave trade that earns the biggest money for criminal groups in eastern Europe," says Michael Platzer, of the Vienna-based United Nations Centre for International Crime Prevention. Not surprisingly, Russian mafia groups have muscled in on the act.

The question of whether or not organised crime has taken over the eastern European prostitution trade is the subject of much obsessive speculation, even in France, which has so far been relatively unaffected.

Most prostitutes in France are French or from Africa or the Maghreb countries. There are no big networks. But Slav women are definitely on the march, and not just on the Champs-Elysées or the Croisette in Cannes. Last year the French police's anti-slave-trade squad sent down a gang of Bulgarians. They were all from the same village and had set up in business, with three dozen women, on Paris's circular boulevard.

In Nancy, an Albanian gang that had specialised in drugs but diversified into prostitution was caught and put away. "This is definitely the new trend," says a police officer. "It's a far cry from the old-fashioned image of the Marseillais pimp with his two or three girls."

The European Union has been slow to mobilise its forces against this threat. The police admit that they know little about the identity or methods of their adversaries; that they lack the resources to stamp out intimidation and help victims; and that the specialised NGOs which do that job are few in number, isolated and sometimes threatened.

Lastly, the EU's determination to act has been blunted by moral differences of opinion: some countries are abolitionist and think that prostitution should be eradicated; others prefer to take a more realistic view and believe in legalising and regulating it.

Whatever the approach adopted by individual countries, all the indications are that the exploitation of the huge reservoir of Slav women whose hopes are first raised, then shattered, is unlikely to dry up in the near future.

(April 26-27)

Right way of thinking

Christiane Chombeau

THE team led by Bruno Mégret, the powerful number two in the far-right National Front (FN), that runs the town of Vitrolles, near Marseille, has by now had ample opportunity to demonstrate what kind of cultural policy it favours.

Its offerings since it took over the town council 15 months ago have included "a Gallic day", "an Indo-European ballet" and the celebration of the centenary of the Italian fascist philosopher, Julius Evola.

Such events are totally in keeping with the philosophy of the "new right" and the Research and Study Group on European Civilisation (Grece). The Grece is a self-styled "society of thought" which has strongly influenced some sections of the far right over the past 30 years.

This school of thought, which is subscribed to by many of the deputy mayors and colleagues of Bruno Mégret's wife, Catherine, who is the "official" mayor of Vitrolles, propounds the supremacy of European civilisation — instead of talking of "Aryans", like the Nazis, it prefers to use the term "Indo-Europeans" — and draws on the "pagan" sources that inspired the SS in Germany.

The takeover has been gradual. First came the destructive phase, marked, among other things, by the sacking in July 1997 of the manager of the Lumières cinema, who had dared to defy the deputy mayor in charge of the arts and show several short films on Aids featuring homosexuals.

Then came the closing-down of the music café, Le Sous-Marin, which played rather too much rap and rai music for the FN's taste. It marked a second, substitutive phase, when the town council set up cultural associations such as Culture en Provence and Sacre du Printemps (Rite of Spring), to organise arts events more in keeping with the FN council's ideology.

This was done discreetly. For once, the council did not call a press conference to announce its programme of events. Similarly, it did not blazon the names of those who came to Vitrolles to give public lectures. But the trained eye could detect the tenor of its cultural policy in the allusions, nudges and winks to be found all over its accompanying literature.

The local Communist daily, La Marseillaise, revealed on May 7 how the "new right" had completely taken over a series of lectures organised by the association Culture en Provence.

Pierre Vial, a member of the FN's political executive and a former head of the Grece, Jean Haudry, head of the Institut Indo-Européen in Lyon and a member of the FN's scientific council, and like-minded lecturers loom large on the town hall's cultural agenda. Mégret and his supporters are clearly determined to turn Vitrolles into an ideological testing ground.

(May 9)

Pakistan Caught in a Nuclear Dilemma

Steven Mufson in Islamabad

IN HER air-conditioned sitting room, with its rich carpet, carved octagonal side tables and fine drawings of historical scenes, Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States smoked a cigarette and talked about nuclear explosions that possess greater destructive force than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

"Pakistan doesn't have a choice," said Moleeha Lodhi, arguing that Pakistan must detonate its own nuclear device to respond to last week's five nuclear tests by arch-rival India. "A nuclear challenge can only be countered by a nuclear counter-response."

That counter-response could be swift. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told ruling Muslim League party workers in Lahore last Sunday that Pakistan could prepare a nuclear test within "12 to 26 hours."

For a time, it seemed as if Pakistan had already set one off. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, in Birmingham, England, for the Group of Eight meeting, said that Pakistan had just conducted a nuclear test. The Pakistani government vigorously denied that report.

"It is only a matter of time," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan told the BBC, adding to the confusion and international concern. Khan said the cabinet had approved a nuclear test blast, but the Foreign Ministry and Sharif's office said the government is keeping its options open.

In the wake of the G-8's failure to agree on concrete sanctions to go along with its condemnation of India's tests and stated intention to deploy nuclear weapons, the domestic political pressure on Pakistani leader Sharif to press the nuclear test button is mounting — despite the potentially dire economic consequences of sanctions that would probably follow a Pakistani test.

"It's a very, very difficult choice," said retired Lt. Gen. Talat Masood, formerly in charge of Pakistan's defense production industries. "It's a no-win situation either way."



Pakistanis protest in Karachi against India's nuclear tests

PHOTOGRAPH: AAMIR QURESHI

The forces pushing Sharif to go ahead with a test include factions of his party, virtually the entire political opposition, Muslim fundamentalists and militant students. His predecessor, Benazir Bhutto, has advocated a nuclear test, and even his own outspoken foreign minister seems to favor one. "I wish there was another road for us, but there isn't," former ambassador Lodhi said.

Though Sharif's political alliance controls two-thirds of the seats in the parliament, the prime minister hesitates to defy popular opinion. Sharif's parliamentary majority came in an election with a low voter turnout.

Yet beneath the surface, there is still widespread disagreement among Pakistanis about key issues, such as nuclear deterrence, the role of the United States and the link between the economy and security.

When it comes to deterrence, many advocates of a Pakistani nuclear test view the Cold War as a model. Faced with a hostile neighbor with five times the territory, eight times the population, more than twice as many soldiers and perhaps a small nuclear arsenal, many influential Pakistanis long for a nuclear standoff with India that will be tense but peaceful. Only by exploding a nuclear device and establishing the fact that nuclear aggression will ensure mutual destruction can Pakistan guarantee its own security, say many opinion leaders here.

Yet other analysts are not certain whether a nuclear test is really needed to deter India from possible aggression. Masood, the retired officer, argues that the mere capability of performing a test is sufficient because Pakistan could always hold its test in India — above ground.

Open testing could lead to more development and deployment. "An arms race will only make things more insecure," Masood said. Unlike the Soviet Union and the United States, Pakistan and India border on one another, have a territorial dispute and often have emotional leaders. "It's a very combustible material," Masood said.

There are also mixed viewpoints concerning the fragility of Pakistan's economy and its vulnerability to international pressure. The finance minister has noted that inflows of foreign capital are keeping Pakistan from defaulting on its international loans. Pakistan's military is as eager as anyone to avoid an economic setback.

Economic sanctions will hurt its ability to get educated, skilled soldiers, replacement parts and new equipment and technology.

At the same time, however, Pakistanis don't want to barter national security interests for commercial ones. Moreover, they say it is unfair that India, because of its insular economy, might be better able to withstand any sanctions that are imposed for testing nuclear devices.

Finally, the role of the United States arouses divided emotions. Pakistan's leaders are upset that the United States tried to play down the danger of India's Hindu nationalist government making good on its campaign pledge to carry out new nuclear tests. Many suspected, at least initially, that the United States deliberately looked the other way when India set off its blasts.

And yet the United States is now clearly leading the campaign for sanctions against India.

India's Tests Enhance China's Reputation

John Pomfret in Beijing

THE EXPLOSION of five nuclear devices in India's forbidding Rajasthan desert has presented China for the second time in less than a year with a powerful opportunity to improve its international influence and reputation, analysts say.

Of all the world's powers, India's huge northern neighbor, which Indian officials identified last week as its main threat, might be poised to best benefit from the fallout of New Delhi's actions. China now has the opportunity to dispel impressions in the West that it poses a threat to the region, while proving that it is serious about its recent promises to stand against nuclear proliferation.

"China comes out a winner," said Bates Gill, a China security specialist at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, "but it could become an even greater winner if it is prepared to accept some of the responsibilities of a great power."

The challenge for China is to resolve the paradox between its 50-year-old revolutionary rhetoric that no country should interfere in the internal affairs of another country and its two-year-old commitment, as a signatory to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, to oppose nuclear proliferation and halt nuclear tests. In addition, China's government must resolve an impending battle between the country's powerful military-technical faction, which could use India's tests as a justification for supplying further nuclear equipment and expertise to India's arch-rival, Pakistan, and its internationalist wing, which has started arguing for a fundamental change in the way China deals with the world.

Just six months ago, China helped stem the spread of Southeast Asia's financial crisis. Its $1 billion loan to Thailand and its refusal to devalue its currency earned Beijing high marks in financial circles.

India's nuclear tests have thrown the region into a different type of crisis. Coupled with the question of whether Pakistan will now stage its first nuclear test and with North Korea threatening to resume its nuclear program, India's actions illustrate that Asia is fast becoming the focal point of global security issues.

With reference to India and North Korea, China appears to be adopting a measured attitude, emphasizing its commitment to regional stability. In its first substantive comment since India's initial tests, China said that India showed "brazen contempt" for international efforts to halt the spread of nuclear weapons and charged that its southern neighbor was plotting to dominate South Asia. But consistent with its earlier restrained response, China made no retaliatory threats.

Instead, China attempted to portray itself as in the vanguard of efforts to stem nuclear proliferation. Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan urged Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright to work with China to press New Delhi to abandon its nuclear weapons program, state-run media reported. In addition, an influential Chinese scholar predicted that China also would be willing to pressure Pakistan, in concert with other countries, not to follow India's lead.

The response shows how far China has come since Mao Tse-tung's day, when revolutionaries called for the proliferation of nuclear weapons to break what they called the U.S.-Soviet monopoly on weapons of mass destruction.

American and Chinese experts predicted that India's actions could provide China with leverage in its relations with the United States. First, if China opposes nuclear proliferation, it would significantly weaken the position of those in the United States who charge that China is a direct threat to American interests. Second, it could strengthen China's hand in negotiations with the United States to remove sanctions restricting the flow of American high technology to China.

Vajpayee's Day of Glory

OPINION
Jim Hoagland

SAY THIS for Atal Bihari Vajpayee: He comes right to the point. The new Indian prime minister burst onto the world stage last week by delivering a nuclear punch to the nose of the international community.

Other candidates for Polecat of the Month status were left eating dust: The carefully cultivated "more in sorrow than in anger" defiance favored by Binyamin Netanyahu, and the stiff thuggish demeanor of Slobodan Milosevic, suddenly seemed rather less cataclysmic on Prime Minister Vajpayee's day of atomic glory.

The Indian leader chose a symbolically charged moment to order his country's first nuclear explosions since 1974. The three experimental underground blasts were carried out on May 11, just as the leaders of the world's seven most affluent industrial democracies, joined by their poor but militarily powerful Russian cousins, were preparing to assemble in Birmingham, England, for their annual two-day parley about the state of the world.

But in a clear hint that the great powers are not so great now, Vajpayee seems to have been oblivious to the timing of their summit. He apparently chose May 11 because it fell on the same Buddhist festival day as the first Indian test in 1974.

The big question he did not answer is why, or at least, why now. The answer seems to be political rather than military.

The Indian prime minister is not about to attack Pakistan or China, the two nations his government has identified as military threats. Instead, he moves to bolster his Hindu nationalist party's standing with an electorate that welcomed the tests, India's outdated pacifist image notwithstanding.

Vajpayee almost certainly calculates that becoming a declared nuclear power ultimately boosts India's chance to gain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and win entry to other international power groups. Would the G-7 have bent their rules and framework to bring Russia halfway into their meetings if Moscow was not the world's second greatest nuclear power? I doubt it.

Vajpayee is an inconvenient fellow in another important aspect: America's strenuous effort to halt the spread of nuclear weapons has been based to a great extent on legitimate fears that a rogue regime headed by a dictator would unleash a global crisis by actually using these things.

India is the world's largest democracy. Vajpayee is neither rogue (in this sense) nor dictator. He is for better or worse an expression of India's collective political judgment. The same can be said for Israel's Netanyahu, who has undeclared but real nuclear weapons in his hip pocket.

Vajpayee's nuclear decision is shocking and reprehensible. But it delivered two needed reminders to Clinton & Colleagues at Birmingham: Power is about will, not words and illusions. And selective nonproliferation is a hard case to make.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
May 24 1998

Early Breast Cancer Drug Shows Dramatic Results

Rick Weiss

A CANCER medicine that is already approved for use against ovarian cancer and advanced breast cancer has been shown for the first time to increase survival dramatically in women with early breast cancer, researchers reported on Monday.

So substantial are the newfound benefits of the drug, called Taxol, that its use in women with early breast cancer should become routine immediately, several doctors said.

"This represents the single most significant advance in the treatment of early stage breast cancer in the past 20 years," said Richard L. Schilsky, director of the University of Chicago Cancer Research Center, speaking at a meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Los Angeles, where the data were presented.

By adding Taxol to the standard regimen of chemotherapy drugs, doctors could save tens of thousands of lives a year worldwide, said Schilsky, who heads the federally funded cancer research consortium that oversaw the trial at more than 100 hospitals.

"This is a very big advance and it can be put into practice right now," said Larry Norton, director of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center's breast center in New York. "When the 19,000 cancer specialists leave this meeting," Norton said, "they are going to go home and widely use this therapy."

The Taxol findings are the latest in a spate of reports about experimental cancer therapies that have generated excitement among scientists and investors and, at the same time, warnings that patients' hopes are being unduly raised.

On Monday, researchers in Los Angeles reported that a new drug called raloxifene appeared to substantially reduce women's odds of developing breast cancer, though they said it was too soon to say whether long-term use was justifiable in women. And three weeks ago two new anti-cancer compounds produced excitement because they looked extremely promising in experiments in mice, though their benefits in people remain unclear.

Neither these nor any other experimental cancer medicines are miracle drugs, experts said, but they are representative of the growing number of chemical strategies being brought to bear against the intransigent disease. The two compounds that look so promising in mice block the formation of new blood vessels that tumors rely upon. By contrast, raloxifene stops the cancer-promoting effects of the hormone estrogen. And Taxol interferes with cancer cell division by tangling up their molecular "skeletons."

These and other emerging strategies are part of an broad effort to "get away from highly toxic drugs and toward a rational design of therapeutics," said Lynn M. Schuchter of the University of Pennsylvania Cancer Center.

Taxol, known generically as paclitaxel, is made by Bristol-Myers Squibb from the needles and twigs of the yew tree. The drug was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1992 for the treatment of advanced ovarian cancer, and in 1994 for advanced breast cancer that has not responded to other medicines. It is given by intravenous infusion in a doctor's office.

The latest study was the first to focus on women with an early stage of breast cancer, in which tumor cells have spread to the lymph nodes but apparently no further — a form of the disease diagnosed in 75,000 American women each year. All of the women were treated with surgery followed by doxorubicin and cyclophosphamide, today's most potent breast cancer drug combination. But some women received additional infusions of Taxol every three weeks for 12 weeks.

Although the study has only been ongoing for four years, and patients have been followed on average for just 18 months, the fates of the two groups are already so divergent that the benefits of Taxol are beyond question, doctors said.

The death rate in the Taxol group is 26 percent lower than for the standard therapy group — about the advantage conferred by existing chemotherapy drugs when compared with no chemotherapy at all. And the number of cancer recurrences is 22 percent lower in the Taxol group. "It's unusual to see an advantage of this magnitude this early in a clinical trial," said Schilsky.

Taxol's side effects are similar to those of other chemotherapy drugs, including temporary hair loss, tingling of the extremities, and in some cases a dangerous decline in the number of immune system cells.

Bristol-Myers Squibb in Princeton, New Jersey, said the company will ask the FDA to approve Taxol for early, so-called lymph node-positive breast cancer, said spokeswoman Jane Kramer. Doctors noted, however, that they already can prescribe approved medicines for unapproved uses, and several said that in this case they would do so immediately.

Hope or hype?, page 31



Bill Gates is charged with using his dominant PC operating system to crush competitors PHOTO AP

Microsoft Sued Over Windows

Rajiv Chandrasekaran

GOVERNMENT lawyers took the world's leading technology company, Microsoft Corp., to court on Monday, filing two broad antitrust suits that seek to set new rules for competition in the digital age.

The suits, filed in federal court here by the Justice Department and 20 state attorneys general, alleged that the software giant has engaged in a pattern of illegal business practices designed to promote its Windows operating system monopoly and crush its competitors.

Although government lawyers are taking on one of the country's most powerful corporations, they're asking for what some experts view as relatively modest changes in Microsoft's business practices. Specifically, they asked a federal judge in Washington to order Microsoft to either strip out its Internet "browsing" software from its upcoming Windows 98 software or include a browser made by rival Netscape Communications Corp. Browsers allow computer users to access information easily from the Internet.

The government lawyers contend that Microsoft, the world's most profitable and best-known software company, is violating antitrust laws by using its monopoly with Windows — the software that runs more than 90 percent of personal computers — to dominate the Internet browser market.

To make their case, the federal and state lawyers presented the court with a raft of internal Microsoft documents, many of them electronic-mail messages among top executives. "Winning Internet browser share is a very, very important goal for us," Gates wrote in January 1996 in one of more than a dozen internal messages cited in the Justice Department suit.

The lawsuits won't stop the release of Windows 98, which Microsoft started shipping to PC manufacturers this week. Instead, Justice and the states asked a judge to issue a quick preliminary injunction that would order Microsoft to make the changes in Windows while the case proceeds. They hope to get that injunction before June 25, when PC makers are scheduled to ship Windows 98-equipped computers to consumers.

The lawsuits could be among the most costly and contentious courtroom battles in business history, rivaling the landmark breakups of Standard Oil Co. and AT&T, according to legal experts. They will pit Micorsoft chairman Bill Gates, the world's richest man, against Joel I. Klein, a tough, Brooklyn-born lawyer who leads the Clinton administration's newly activist corps of antitrust enforcers.

The Justice Department suit focuses on Microsoft's battle with Netscape, the company that invented browsers only to face a withering assault from Microsoft. The suit lays out Microsoft's efforts to use the dominant position of Windows to best Netscape.

But the department's investigation into Microsoft is continuing beyond browser issues. Sources have said the government will set its sights next on Windows NT, Microsoft's operating system software for corporate computer networks.

The suit filed by the 20 states and the District of Columbia goes beyond the Justice Department case by asking for the judge also to force Microsoft to change the way it sells its "Office" suite of programs to computer makers. The states charge that Microsoft's licenses Office, which includes word-processing and spreadsheet software, to PC makers in a way that discourages them from licensing competing software.

News of the lawsuits led to a sell-off in Microsoft stock on Wall Street, causing the company to lose almost $8.3 billion in market value. But financial analysts said they doubted the litigation would have a significant impact on the company's sales and profits in coming months.

Microsoft has long maintained that Internet browsing technology is inexorably intertwined in Windows 98 and cannot be separated without a massive revision of the product. If Microsoft loses in court, government lawyers expect the company to offer Netscape's browser instead of chopping up Windows 98.

Reciting what has become a common Microsoft refrain, Gates said government demands to include Netscape software in Windows is like "requiring Coca-Cola to include three cans of Pepsi in every six-pack it sells." To that, a senior government official responded: "If Coca-Cola owned the only store in town, you can bet it would be required to sell Pepsi too."

'Partial-Birth' Abortion Ban Shuts Clinics

Barbara Vobejda and Joan Biskupic

ABORTION clinics across Wisconsin shut down last week after one of the nation's most sweeping "partial-birth" abortion bans went into effect.

Wisconsin doctors and virtually every clinic in the state have stopped performing abortions, citing fear that because of vague language in the state's new law, they could be prosecuted and imprisoned even for providing other types of abortions.

So-called partial-birth abortion, a late-term procedure in which the fetus is partially delivered into the vagina before it is aborted, has become the new battleground in the abortion rights debate, with two dozen states across the country passing laws banning the procedure. A similar law has been passed twice by Congress and vetoed both times by President Clinton.

The dispute flaring up in Wisconsin could ensure that this state becomes the center of the intensifying national debate. Its law went into effect last week after a federal judge refused to delay it, making Wisconsin the first state in which abortion rights groups challenging "partial-birth" abortion laws have not succeeded in having the statutes blocked. And experts on both sides said Wisconsin's penalty for doctors who disobey the ban — life imprisonment — is the strongest sanction on the books.

Signed by Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson (R) earlier this month, the law bans abortions in which a doctor "partially vaginally delivers a living child, causes the death of the partially delivered child with the intent to kill the child and then completes the delivery of the child." The law defines "child" as "a human being from the time of fertilization until it is completely delivered from a pregnant woman."

Opponents of the law said that language could apply to a broad range of abortions, even those performed early in a pregnancy. But the measure's supporters disagreed, calling the decision by doctors not to perform abortions a political tactic meant to distort the intent of the law.

The issue of "partial-birth" abortions has been bitterly contested in Congress and across the country for several years. Abortion rights groups have argued that the procedure is relatively rare, but opponents say they believe it is particularly brutal and have fought to have it outlawed. Congress could vote on the issue again in the coming months in an effort to override the president's veto.

Bonnie Jones, an attorney for the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, said she had advised the doctors she represents not to perform abortions "given the harshness of the criminal penalties and the ease with which they may be exposed" to prosecution.

Dr. Dennis Christensen, one of the doctors challenging the law, said he knew of no doctors in the state providing abortions late last week.

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Bored Gulf Teenagers Turn To Drugs

John Lancaster in Kuwait

EVERY night, Ibrahim, a third-year math student at the national university here, retreats to the privacy of his room and kneels on the floor, facing toward the Muslim holy city of Mecca. Murmuring verses from the Koran, he prostrates himself before Allah and begs forgiveness for what he is about to do. Then he prepares a 100-milliliter dose of heroin and injects it into one of his veins.

"I pray and then I take heroin," said Ibrahim, 21, puffing nervously on a Marlboro in a social club run by the local chapter of Narcotics Anonymous, where he has come to seek help for his $70-a-day habit. "I don't know what's happening in this world. I lost my family, my friends, everything."

The diminutive, rail-thin addict is a casualty of an alarming surge in drug use among the citizens of this prosperous desert sheikdom on the Persian Gulf.

In the seven years since Allied forces rid the country of Iraqi troops in the Persian Gulf War, authorities have reported sharp increases in drug overdoses and drug-related arrests. The amount of heroin seized has skyrocketed. Schools are said to be afflicted by substance abuse, including the sniffing of glue and solvents.

In the view of foreign and Kuwaiti experts, Kuwait's drug problem stems in part from rapid Westernization that has eroded traditional Islamic values in this oil-rich country of 1.6 million, more than half of whom are expatriate workers and their families. Other factors include boredom, affluence and proximity to Iran, a major transit point for heroin produced in Afghanistan and shipped here on motorized wooden dhows.

"It's a market ripe for the picking," a Western diplomat said. "You have a young population (with money), and you have very little in the way of social activities to keep people interested."

After a period of denial, the country's political leaders have begun to face the problem. The emir, Sheik Jabir Ahmed Sabah, ordered the formation of a drug prevention committee last year. State television recently began airing specials featuring cautionary tales by recovering addicts.

"The country has moved very fast to a Western way of life, and this is one of the effects," Ahmed Bakr, a conservative Muslim and a member of the health committee in the parliament, said in an interview. "Almost everything that happens in the West, Kuwaitis imitate."

Throughout the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf, sudden oil wealth has caused wrenching social change, including an influx of drugs. The United Arab Emirates recently established a central drug treatment facility. Narcotics Anonymous operates in Bahrain and even Saudi Arabia, a country of strict Islamic laws where convicted drug dealers are decapitated in Riyadh's central square.

"Materialism has become everything in our lives now, whether in Kuwait or America," said Abdul Hamid Belali, director of a Kuwaiti drug-treatment center that relies heavily on the Koran. "Every wealthy country is facing this problem."

The amount of heroin seized in Kuwait jumped from seven pounds in 1994 to 106 pounds in 1996, the most recent year for which figures are available, according to Interior Ministry statistics.

Drug overdoses killed 52 people last year, compared with 22 the year before, according to statistics gathered by Belali, who estimated 15,000 of the country's 660,000 citizens use illegal drugs. Drug-related arrests have surged from 375 in 1992 to 841 in 1996, of which a majority — 496 — were Kuwaiti citizens, government figures show.

Many Kuwaitis see the 1990 Iraqi invasion as a turning point. It sent much of the population fleeing to North America and Europe and, after liberation, exposed the country to even greater outside influence.

Another factor, according to experts, is boredom. Teenagers are tantalized by Western culture absorbed from satellite television or during trips abroad. Yet diversions are few in a conservative Islamic society that frowns on mingling between the sexes and restricts amusement parks to families.

"A gram of heroin [costs $328], and for Kuwaitis, this is nothing," said Jaber, 31, a former fire inspector who recently finished a 22-month jail term after he was caught with a pound of hashish. "I know of girls 13 or 14 years old who are [using] heroin."

As elsewhere, drug abuse in Kuwait cuts across class and educational lines. The local chapter of Narcotics Anonymous is directed by Abu Abdullah, 40, a round-faced stockbroker who drives a maroon Lexus and appears to have a mobile phone permanently grafted to his ear. Another participant is Nawaf, 26, an army sergeant who said he began using heroin soon after his release from an Iraqi POW camp in 1991.

After futile attempts at treatment in Saudi Arabia and Switzerland, Nawaf joined Narcotics Anonymous and has not used drugs since beginning its 12-step recovery program in November, he said.

Drug use is heavily stigmatized in Kuwait, and families are reluctant to seek help for an afflicted member. Kuwait has no full-time counseling center, and its main drug rehabilitation unit is housed in a converted World War II army barracks.

The parliament recently approved stiffer drug penalties, including death for traffickers, although the emir has yet to sign off on any executions.

According to officials, the emir's drug committee is laying plans for a major anti-drug campaign, including television programs, advertisements and educational materials.

"The government is concerned, but as in other countries, it works in slow motion," said an Interior Ministry official who asked to remain nameless. "It's a matter of time."



Long March of an American Writer

Michael Pearson

WILLIAM STYRON
A Life
By James L. W. West III
Random House. 596 pp. $30

THOMAS CARLYLE once remarked, "A well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one." In James West's biography of William Styron, the reader finds both, a life story written with care and precision about one of the most provocative and controversial contemporary American novelists.

It may not be the typical tale of an American writer, the story we associate with Poe, Melville, or Fitzgerald, a narrative about a writer who is damned by dollars, forced into hack work or Hollywood, dismissed, forgotten, out of print until his books are resurrected by some scholar years after his death. Styron's story is closer to Twain's or Hemingway's, the American fairy tale with a twist, an account of early success and the difficulties that fame creates.

There is a potential problem with West's biography, though, that arises before the reader even gets to the opening chapter. Biographies usually act as post-mortems, but this one by necessity must function as something of a work-in-progress. Styron, at 72, is still an active writer, with another big book or two in him, perhaps. Biographical definitiveness may be an illusion, but in this case it appears to be an impossibility.

Though open-ended, the biography is lucid and well-researched. Styron is a major American writer, and West's biography will be a footing for all those that follow. The essentials of Styron's story are here, along with valuable insights about the novels and the writer's creative process.

In the 18th century the Styron clan emigrated from England to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, where they made their living from the sea. In the early part of the 20th century, Styron's father moved to Tidewater Virginia to work at Newport News Shipbuilding. In Tidewater, Styron grew up listening to his grandfather's tales of the Civil War. Styron, like his father, always felt himself to be an outsider in Newport News. His mother, a Pennsylvanian, never felt comfortable in the South at large, and in particular her long battle with cancer, for more than a decade, cut her off from the world around her in Tidewater.

His mother's long suffering, the separation that it caused her and him, and her agonizing death when he was 14 years old were central factors, according to West, in the creation of Styron's artistic psyche. After his father remarried a woman that Styron could never get along with, his alienation increased.

It made matters more difficult for him that he was an indifferent student. Like other American writers before him, Steinbeck and Faulkner, for instance, Styron gave his attention only to those subjects that interested him. He drifted through public school, prep school, a year at Davidson, and a short time at Duke until World War II caught up with him and he entered the Marine Corps. The atomic bomb was dropped before he was ordered overseas, but he did experience his own brand of horror in the military when he was falsely diagnosed with syphilis and isolated in the VD ward.

In 1946 he returned to Duke,


William Styron: A life-in-progress of a passionate writer

where he was influenced by William Blackburn, an English professor who started him on his way as a creative writer. He graduated from Duke, but that was enough formal education for him: "For a person whose sole, burning ambition is to write — like myself — college is useless beyond Sophomore year." After a brief and dreary time in publishing, he became, with some financial help from his father, a full-time writer. In 1951, after another unhappy but short stint in the Marines, his first novel, Lie Down In Darkness, was published, making him a famous writer.

As West makes clear, Styron stayed in the public consciousness from that point forward — in particular with the controversies surrounding The Confessions Of Nat Turner and Sophie's Choice. Along with controversy came a Pulitzer Prize and other awards, bestsellers, and big money deals with movie producers. The benefits of success were many — homes in the Connecticut countryside and on Martha's Vineyard and time to write — but there was a price, as well: attacks in the press, hecklers at speaking engagements, and threatening letters. And, eventually, there was a nervous breakdown.

Styron's experiences seem to be a dark and complex version of the Horatio Alger story. West's biography details the life-in-progress of a passionate writer, a novelist of great artistry and conviction, a well-spent life, a well-told tale.

Search for Equilibrium in a Black World

Rachel Jones

WILLOW WEEP FOR ME
A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression
By Meri Nana-Ama Danquah
Norton. 272pp. $23.95

MORE often than not, literary depictions of the black female's psyche are so loaded with mysticism and drama that they rise to a level of mythic "she-roism." For example, the exquisite anguish of Janie, Zora Neale Hurston's heroine in Their Eyes Were Watching God, transcends mere mortal pain. In nonfiction accounts, the stories of women such as Harriet Tubman or Billie Holiday illustrate the extremely divergent portraits of the black woman's interior life. When we succeed, it's big; when we fail, it's even bigger, but it's all analyzed the same way — black women are as tough as old shoe leather.

That's why Meri Nana-Ama Danquah's powerfully frank and poignant memoir Willow Weep For Me must join the pantheon of books that smash preconceived notions and open new dialogues. It confronts one of the most persistent myths around — that all black women are too strong and too busy "takin' care of business" to succumb to the crippling effects of depression. This beautifully written first book, the author's thoughtful examination of her own downward spiral and how she fought back, is absorbing and inspirational.

Danquah's life perfectly illustrates the psychological land mines that can await black women in America. A Ghanaian immigrant who came to Washington at age 6, she offers numerous examples of traumatizing racial experiences and the toll taken by low self-esteem. Yet Danquah adds enough insight and context to avoid sounding like a victim; instead her memoir has a blunt, sometimes clinical tone.

Early on, she recalls the cynical reaction of a white female who heard she was writing a book about black women and depression: " 'Isn't that kinda redundant?' The people standing around us exchanged abrasive chuckles. 'Don't get me wrong,' the woman continued, taking a sip of her cocktail. There wasn't a hint of apology in her voice. 'It's just that when black women start going on Prozac, you know the whole world is falling apart.' "

Indeed, it is that constant juggling of societal expectations, of swallowing slights and insensitivities, carrying on when you feel your whole world has fallen apart, that can lead to the ravaging clinical depression Danquah admits she still struggles with. She has painstakingly examined the roots of her own struggle; her frank depiction of a troubled family life with her critical, caustic mother is sad yet illuminating. She briefly mentions sexual abuse, from her first, traumatic encounter with a neighbor to her mother's overly attentive boyfriend.

Her father, with whom she shared a deep and abiding affection, left the family when she was 8, and Danquah describes a recurring dream in which she watches herself drown. This ultimately leads her back to the Takoma Park neighborhood of her youth, memories of which flood her mind. Danquah's lyrical descriptions of childhood heartache are wrenching. She writes:

"The kingdom of the night was mine, and inside of it, I discovered ways to reinvent myself. I sang, recited poems and danced for the make-believe audience seated at the foot of my bed. Before daybreak, I would tune the small clock radio to my favorite sad song station and listen to the woeful words. How could a heart so young beat to the syncopated sorrows of such rhythms? Under the roof of the same home, there was a child crying like a grown woman in one room, a mother whimpering like a child in the other."

Danquah's memoir carefully details the everyday pitfalls of battling depression, revealing the shame, frustration and despair it causes. But the book is most valuable when she describes her journey toward psychotherapy — the early disdain, her financial struggles, her fear of medication and attempts to blunt the pain with alcohol — hurdles confronting many black women seeking help for mental illnesses. Danquah's pain comes full circle when she finds out that her younger sister Paula also battles depression. Her desperate quest to reclaim equilibrium for the sake of her daughter Korama is especially touching.

An early analogy sums up this book's enormous value, and the need to acknowledge that in this society, black women are rarely seen as vulnerable and emotionally complex. Danquah excerpts a poem about Billie Holiday by E. Ethelbert Miller: "Some men, when they first heard her sing, were only attracted to the flower in her hair."

This complete negation of the many facets that constitute a woman is an ongoing problem for black women. Meri Nana-Ama Danquah has offered us a vividly textured flower of a memoir that will surely stand as one of the finest to come along in years.

Hardcovers

The Murrays of Murray Hill, By Charles Monaghan (Urban History Press, 534 Third St., Brooklyn, NY 11215, $25)

SOME while back, Charles Monaghan started collecting early American readers, grammars and schoolbooks. As his collection grew, Monaghan became especially fascinated with Lindley Murray (1745-1826), "the largest-selling author in the world in the first four decades of the 19th century," mainly because of the phenomenal success of his Grammar and English Reader. Of this last, Lincoln himself once said that it was "the best schoolbook ever put in the hands of an American youth." Intrigued, Monaghan began to research Murray's family and career (a loyalist, he spent his later years not in New York, where Murray Hill is located, but as an exile in York, England). Monaghan's research — over 10 years' worth — has been extensive and includes the advice and expertise of his wife, E. Jennifer Monaghan, a leading authority on literacy education in early America. The resulting volume about the unjustly forgotten but once "immortal Murray" should appeal to anybody interested in American studies, book-collecting or the history of books and publishing.

The Scents of Eden: A Narrative of the Spice Trade, By Charles Corn (Kodansha, $27)

LIKE "the Barbary Coast" and "the Spanish Main," the very phrase "the Spice Islands" is redolent of romance. In the days of sailing ships and nautical derring-do, voyages to these small islands in the Malay Archipelago were fraught with peril: Men risked their ships and lives to acquire the holy trinity of spices — cloves, nutmeg and mace — and then fought their way home to fortune. Charles Corn, author of Distant Islands, chronicles four centuries of such swashbuckling adventure, as he follows the exploits of Magellan, Portuguese empire-builders, the Dutch East Indies company, French smugglers, and Yankee traders. Corn draws on considerable archival material (diaries, memoirs), but knows that a popular historian needs to make his story exciting and colorful as well as factual.

The Long Falling, By Keith Ridgway (Houghton Mifflin, $22)

THE complex relationship between love, fear and betrayal is thoroughly examined in this debut novel by Keith Ridgway, a young Dubliner. Ridgway's protagonist, Grace Quinn, is an Englishwoman who has lived her entire adult life in rural Ireland. Isolated by religion and circumstance, she has remained an outsider. Her isolation is exacerbated by an abusive husband (who blames her for the long-ago death of one of their sons) and an estranged relationship with her remaining son, a homosexual whose lifestyle is condemned by his father. An act of desperation forces Grace to seek out Martin in Dublin. Confusion haunts her as she journeys. "It clung to her," Ridgway writes. "In the dim light of Dublin, with the rain falling and the cars glinting and the crowds of people gathered by the roads, it clung to her." To escape confusion, Grace must shake off her doubts and discover her own true nature in the process.

Britain's newest universities are winning the race for the best students, reports **Martin Bright**

The new Oxbridge

"THE University of Warwick," says Michael Shattock with a grin. "The name is central to our success." The registrar, who doubles as unofficial historian of the university, uses the name as often as he can.

Shattock is delighted about the league tables published in the Financial Times last month, which said the University of Warwick was better than Oxford at teaching undergraduates. The FT also placed Warwick in the top 10 for research and the A level grades of applicants. It beat Oxford and Cambridge in the number of applicants per place.

The University of Warwick, Shattock says, was one of the first places to teach foreign literature on an English course; 60 per cent of income at the University of Warwick comes from business and research grants; the University of Warwick has one of the best maths departments in Britain.

And film studies, law, politics, engineering and comparative literature are all also very good indeed at ...the University of Warwick.

Shattock thinks "the University of Warwick" sounds like a long-established institution in a proud ancient city, when in fact it is barely three decades old — and isn't even in Warwick. It was built on farmland outside Coventry and took its first students in 1965.

After giving Oxford an 800-year head start, Warwick and York (the other new university success story) are making up for lost time. They have already pushed redbricks such as Leeds and Liverpool into the academic second division and are closing the gap on Oxbridge and the big London colleges.

A French government study published in 1993 said Warwick was "Europe's most outstanding example of how a university should interact with industry".

Tony Blair was talking about the university rather than the city when he said last year: "Warwick is at the cutting edge of what has to happen for the future."

The name, it turns out, was a political fluke. When the plans for a university in the Midlands were drawn up in the early sixties, there was a battle between the councillors of industrial Coventry and rural Warwickshire. "University of Coventry" was unacceptable to the farming community that surrounds the city, and "University of Mid-Warwickshire" was too much of a mouthful. So the founding fathers called it Warwick: a lie.

Like the other "new" universities established in the early sixties (Sussex, Essex, Lancaster, Kent, East Anglia and York), Warwick attracted radical young academics keen to escape traditional university structures. Lecturers were encouraged to develop their own courses.


Warwick is better than Oxford at teaching undergraduates, according to an FT survey PHOTO GARY CALTON

Asked to identify the moment when Warwick began to establish itself as a world-class university, staff point to 1981, the year the Thatcher government introduced the first post-war cuts in state spending on higher education. While other universities panicked and introduced sweeping cuts, Warwick committed itself to finding outside investment.

Lecturers in all subjects were encouraged to find sponsors. The sixties' radicals set to it with relish. In the last financial year only 39 per cent of funding came from central government.

"I know it's heretical," says Susan Basnett, Professor of Comparative Literature and pro-vice chancellor for quality, "but radical academics voted against Conservative policies while benefiting hugely from the Thatcherite entrepreneurial spirit."

So Warwick became the bastard child of sixties radicalism and eighties Thatcherism. Last year it raised entry grades across the board. It also appeals to the sort of students who would never dream of going to Oxford and Cambridge. Private school intake is under 20 per cent compared with Oxbridge's 50 per cent.

Jo Scaife, a law student who has just been elected student union president, got straight As at A-level from a state sixth-form college, but said she never seriously considered Oxbridge.

"My teachers said I should apply to Cambridge, but I thought their law degree was antiquated. It wasn't tailored to the needs of a young graduate. I wanted something that put law in context."

Oxford and Cambridge are desperately attempting to adapt their admissions policy to attract state school candidates. If they don't, they recognise that rival universities will snap up the best candidates from comprehensives.

Britain may be witnessing the development of an alternative élite dominated by "Yorwick" — the new Oxbridge. — *The Observer*

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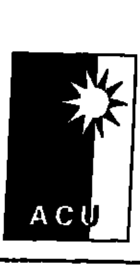
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Abbreviations: P - Professor; AP - Associate Professor; SL - Senior Lecturer; L - Lecturer; AL - Assistant Lecturer.

For further details of any of the above staff vacancies please contact ACU (Advertising), 36 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PF, UK (Internat. tel. +44 171 387 8572 ext. 206 [UK office hours]; fax +44 171 383 0368; e-mail: appls@acu.ac.uk), quoting reference number of post(s). Details will be sent by airmail/first class post. A sample copy of the publication *Appointments in Commonwealth Universities*, including subscription details, is available from the same source.



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THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM IN THE MODERN WORLD (ISIM)

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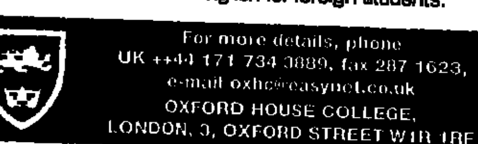
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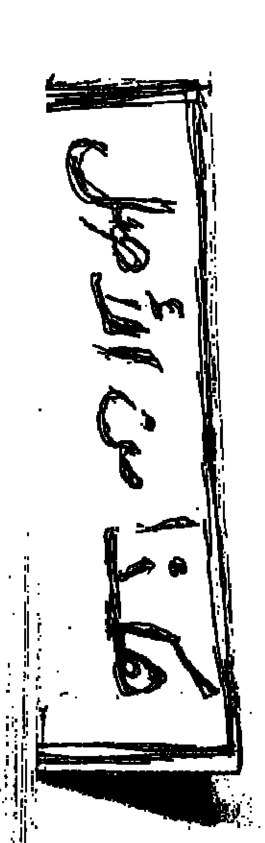
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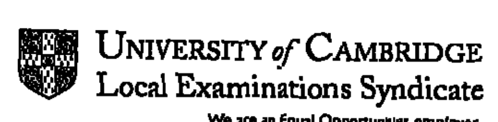
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For further details and an application form (please state which job you wish to apply for) please contact Jo McKenzie, Health Unlimited, Prince Consort House, 27-29 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TS; email:ae161@dial.pipex.com • fax +44 171 582 5900 • Closing date for returned application forms Friday 19 June 1998.



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Sean French investigates why the not-so-fair sex is depressed, and what society should be doing about it

Men in trouble

LAST week Norman Mailer, that archetypal male writer, the man who named his penis "the avenger", celebrated his 75th birthday. He said in an interview that he anticipated a female-dominated world. In the future there would only be 100 surviving men whose function would be to act as "semen slaves to a planet of women". In response to which, being a man, I ought to say something like: "nice work if you can get it". Because that's what men do, isn't it? Make jokes.

Imagine the world with only 100 men. No war. No crime. Pop music might be a bit dodgy, entirely composed of female singer-songwriters. Football wouldn't be up to much, but then nobody would want to go and see it anyway. Major global conflicts would be sorted out through negotiation and compromise. Women are good at communication, always have been. Almost the only thing I can remember my grandfather telling me was a joke. Question: What are the three fastest ways of transmitting information? Answer: Telephone, telegram, and tell a woman.

You've got to laugh, haven't you? "Don't worry, it may never happen." That's what men are meant to say when they see another man looking distressed. The other man is then meant to say: "It already has." Then you both laugh. And now that you've got the emotional bit out of the way you can have a drink.

I've just met the sister of a man I was at university with and haven't seen since. When I told her of the connection, the first thing she said was: "Were you happy there?" I replied lightheartedly: "In a word: no." She said her brother had been desperately unhappy. I had thought he was having a wonderful time. And I knew he thought I was having a wonderful time, and it seemed a good idea to let him and other people carry on thinking that.

This is Samaritans Week, dedicated to "the importance of listening throughout society". The campaign is aimed mainly at men because women are already good at listening — another part of the reason why women are good at talking.

The Samaritans Week advertisement features statistics that may seem contradictory: 54 per cent of young women and 32 per cent of young men have felt at some stage that life is not worth living. Yet of the 6,000 people who commit suicide each year, three-quarters are men.

It also seems that the traditional gap in rates of depression between women and men may be narrowing. A study in the British Medical Journal of men and women admitted to Scottish hospitals between 1980 and 1995 shows the female admission rate has fallen while the male admission has risen. The researchers, Polash Shajahan and Jonathan Cavanagh, conclude that the most significant causes may lie in social changes during the period,



It's a woman's world . . . as mothers become breadwinners, men whose skills are redundant — like these unemployed shipbuilders in Newcastle — are left holding the baby PHOTOGRAPH: ROBIN LAURANCE

including: "a decrease in the number of men in full-time work, and an increase in the number of women in ... work. For men, the resultant loss of status as sole financial provider for the family, the perceived loss in social status, and the consequent social isolation could all be considered risk factors for depression."

In Western societies there has been a massive decline in the (almost entirely male) jobs which involve lifting objects, and a massive increase in the jobs which involve the transfer of information. These new jobs are about tapping keyboards and liaising with people, and women are better at these things. At the same time, girls are doing better at school and are more ambitious.

What men "ought" to have done in response to this change is to stay at school and get these skills and then later, in their personal lives, to adjust the male and female roles within the family according to their particular economic circumstances.

But this change is very much easier for some groups than for others. Take my own experience in journalism. I used to do quite a lot of interviews but found that both men and women seem happier to confide in women than men, and so, gradually, I moved towards doing other things. But then I'm a writer and if you confess to such weaknesses — if that's what they are — then people may think you're sensitive or endearing. And if you warm up a pizza and take the children to school occasionally, then people think you're a New Man.

However, if you're an ex-miner who has been unemployed for 10 years and your wife is working at a local crisp factory, and if collecting the children from school is seen as a sign of weakness, then it's a little more difficult to be charmingly self-deprecating about the shift in roles.

The problem is that we are not just free economic agents. Our sense of self went along with our social role. Being a father was about being the supporter of the family, in terms of money and punishment. And despite other hopes and ambitions, women's sense of self was bound up with their role as mothers. The change in roles may be inevitable, but it is awkward for the generation of women who feel they are failing as mothers, of men who feel, albeit gratefully, that they are not quite the men their fathers were.

There have been inevitable attempts at reasserting, or rediscovering masculinity. At various stages of the nineties, men have gathered to beat tom-toms and sniff each other's armpits. But if there is anything more ludicrous than the backlash against the female threat, it is the attempt to somehow legislate or preach the genie back into the bottle. According to some neo-conservative commentators, it seems that what the modern ambitious, educated and motivated young woman can contribute to society is to find a yob hanging around a street corner and restore his sense of confidence by marrying him, giving up work and getting his dinner on the table.

The solution will be what it always is: muddle, political gestures, and, one hopes, a gradual process of adjustment, involving law enforcement but mainly education. Probably there will be generations of "lost" men just as there were generations and generations of "lost" women. Meanwhile for "listening week", men, what you must do is to practise following up the question "how are you?" with, "no, I mean, how are you — really?" Unless you meet me, that is.

CLASSIFIED

CAR HIRE

An enemy of the people

Four weeks ago this man, a brutal child-killer and one of the most feared men in Europe, went on the run from a Belgian courthouse. Marc Dutroux was quickly recaptured, but he has brought one of the most corrupt countries in Europe to its knees. Report by **Stephen Bates**

AS *MARC DUTROUX*, Belgium's most feared and reviled paedophile, was driven back to his prison cell after his recent three-and-a-half-hour escape from custody, a thin, self-satisfied smile could be seen playing across his lips. It's a smirk that Belgians have grown maddeningly used to in the 20 months since his original capture. His level, knowing expression is apparent even in his police mug shot, a look of defiance and composure, totally at odds with the terrible crimes of which he is accused.

His appearance of calm, detached control tells all Belgians something they can scarcely bear — that he has run rings round the authorities and undermined the whole fabric of their country. The 41-year-old electrician from Charleroi has come closer than anyone in the country's 168-year history to bringing down the state.

Dutroux has exposed the awful truth that the state is rotten.Three weeks after his escape, two years after his crimes first exposed systemic failures in its justice and policing system, politicians remain paralysed, seemingly incapable of effecting change.

Step into any of the bars in Brussels and you are hit by a kind of dazed fatalism, tinged with hilarity about what their country is coming to. Belgians have long had to live down jokes about how many of their famous countrymen you can name, but as Dutroux heads the list, this time it's gone beyond a joke. You sense that a terrible reckoning is coming for the politicians who, through negligence and complacency, have done nothing to wipe the smile off his face and the stain off their country.

Last week the Belgian prime minister, Jean-Luc Dehaene, called the leaders of the country's eight main political parties together to try to hammer out an agreement for rapid and fundamental reforms within a fortnight. In the end they managed to agree — in principle — to merge the local traffic police with the gendarmerie. Anything more radical would have threatened the politicians' grip on local patronage. No wonder their prime captive is smirking.

Consider what effect Dutroux has had. He has plunged the government into almost permanent crisis, undermined public confidence in the police and judiciary, caused the resignation of two senior ministers and the chief of police and single-handedly rocked Belgium's reputation abroad. And he has not even come to trial yet.

Thomas Tindemans, a Brussels-based political consultant and son of a former prime minister, says: "If this country ceases to exist, it will be because of incidents like this. The politicians seem to have no will at all to change while the country is palpably calling out for action. We seem to be at the same level as some African country which can't even govern itself. It is a national humiliation."

Dutroux's alleged crimes are truly horrific. They include the abduction of six young girls and the murder of four of them, plus the burying alive of an accomplice with whom he had fallen out. Two of the children, just eight years old, were kept locked in a small cell in Dutroux's basement, where eventually they starved to death while their captor was in prison for four months. Two teenagers, who had disappeared on a night out while on holiday, were later also found, buried in another of Dutroux's backyards. When police broke into the cell in the basement, they found two other girls — aged 12 and 14 — sexually abused but still alive.

Dutroux had no sooner led the police to the bodies than it became clear that their inquiries into missing children had been handled with almost malign incompetence. Rival police forces — despite its size Belgium has three — not only failed to co-operate in their parallel investigations but positively attempted to put their rivals off the scent. They knew all about Dutroux because he was a convicted sex offender who was freed in 1992 after serving just three years of a 13-year sentence for abduction and rape.

They had his house under surveillance. They even searched it three times, hearing children's voices on one occasion. And yet they failed to stop him, or find the girls alive. During this time the police had been telling the desperate father of one of them that, as he was of Italian extraction, his daughter's disappearance was probably a Mafia plot.

So incompetent was the investigation that most Belgians, used to the ways of their low-calibre police force and their country's politicians, assumed that Dutroux must have been receiving protection from secret paedophiles high up in public life. The truth turned out to be worse: he escaped detection because the whole criminal investigative system, led by ill-trained and under-paid, politically appointed magistrates, was chronically obtuse and systemically malfunctioning. People suddenly started realising that the police had not solved a major crime for years and that the system was rotten.

But the latest crisis is qualitatively different. Any country can have a mass murderer in its midst, but it takes incompetence of a high order to let him out again. It was the manner of Dutroux's escape four weeks ago that really shocked the country, because it showed that nothing had changed. And this time, as the press noted, Belgium had become an international laughing-stock.

Dutroux was being taken daily from his special cell at Arlon prison, in the far southeast of the country, to inspect the papers relating to his case a few miles away at the Palais de Justice in Neufchateau. On the day he escaped he had just two policemen with him. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone to send him copies of the papers in his cell instead.

At the court, the handcuffs were taken off Dutroux. One policeman wandered off to fetch him another document, while the other sat yawning nearby. Dutroux pushed the man to the ground, seized his pistol and ran out of the building. He stopped a passing motorist, pushed him out of his car and drove off, leaving his two guards waving their arms and running down the road after him.

People suddenly started realising that the police had not solved a major crime for years

No wonder prime minister Dehaene issued a wild expletive when he was told the news in Brussels half an hour later. Parliament suspended its session and the cabinet went into an emergency meeting. When Dehaene popped up on television that night merely saying he was dismayed, the outrage could be heard across the country. Fortunately, Dutroux was recaptured after his car got bogged down in a muddy track in the forest and he was spotted by a park ranger running through the woods.

Had he not been found, the government would almost certainly have fallen. It got worse: the police gun Dutroux had stolen was unloaded, because the police routinely disarm their weapons before escorting prisoners to court.

It then transpired that Michèle Martin, Dutroux's wife, also in custody, was recently separated from her guards when she got into a lift at court and the doors closed behind her. Instead of running, she docilely waited for them when she got out.

Belgium is a country in criminal turmoil. Quite apart from Dutroux and his associates, there's Pastor Pandy, a Hungarian-born clergyman who seems to have been bumping off members of his family for several decades.

Then there's the butcher of Mons, who has been cutting up prostitutes and leaving their bodies scattered round the town in plastic bags. They still have not tried the men alleged to have shot down the former deputy prime minister, Andre Cools, seven years ago, nor caught the masked gunmen who went round shooting up supermarket car parks, killing 28 shoppers, in the 1980s.

Nor have they caught anyone for the current spate of violent hijackings of limousines in the Brussels area. More than 200 have been stolen, usually by men wielding sub-machine-guns and bundling drivers out of their cars at traffic lights or in their front driveways.

Some of this may be unavoidable in a small country at the hub of Europe: criminals know they can get over any one of four national borders from virtually anywhere in Belgium within an hour. But some of these events go to the heart of a national system, in a cobbled-together country with three languages and two mutually antagonistic populations, French- and Flemish-speaking. Compromise has always been regarded as the highest political art.

Belgians will tell you that throughout their history they have been ruled by foreigners in uniform — Romans, French, Austrians, Spaniards, Dutch, Germans — which is why they hold officialdom and especially the forces of law and order in scant regard. As a Belgian you don't go into the police to be looked up to by society. Or to be well paid. Or even, particularly, to catch criminals.

Nevertheless the country is governed by bureaucracy and paperwork to a degree unimaginable in Britain. It is no wonder that most ordinary Belgians try to evade the system as much as they can. Similarly the tax laws, like others in Europe, are both cumbersome and onerous. No wonder the Belgian black economy is one of the biggest in Europe with perhaps 20 per cent of deals done under the counter.

Belgians could not help noticing Dutroux's ability to avoid scrutiny by the authorities, despite claiming the dole while owning several properties around Charleroi. He was clearly cheating on a grand scale. He got round the system only too easily: all the paperwork, all the bureaucracy, all the investigation failed to stop him. In one sense the conspiracy theorists are right: officialdom did protect him.

The Belgian system has always been based on a pact with its citizens. They get on with their lives and leave the politicians to do the deals which keep the country functioning.

But often the politicians have little control beyond making appointments. They seem to lose interest when it comes to accountability. When the government wanted to sack the national police chief, General Willy Deridder, earlier this month it discovered it did not have the legal power.

It took Dutroux to make people realise how ineffectively the system was functioning. And it took his crimes to make them feel ashamed and angry.

For Dehaene, a podgy, neckless man who epitomises the Belgian bourgeoisie, the cloud that is Dutroux must have seemed originally no bigger than a man's hand. When the bodies were found two summers ago he did not even bother to break his holiday. He has always been a political fixer, genial and deceptively smart, which has been his great political strength. Now he must know that it will be Dutroux's name that is engraved on his heart when his political obituaries come to be written in 14 months' time, after the scheduled general election.

And — just his luck — thanks to the palsied judicial system he has done virtually nothing to reform, that should be just about the time the court sentences Dutroux — his nemesis to the end.

Dehaene has survived so far, even when 300,000 Belgians marched in protest through the streets of Brussels in October 1996 by promising reforms to the system. This time his situation is more desperate. Which is why he threw out his justice and interior ministers and then forced the resignation of the police chief. Ironically, all three are Flemings, taking the rap for blunders in the French half of the country. This is a point not lost on Flemish separatists.

It is clear that the politicians cannot come up with solutions for reform. Even if Dehaene goes, none of his rivals has any coherent plan.

However, what could ultimately prove fatal for Dehaene, in the home of surrealism is that the population has started laughing at him. In a land of despair, that could be disastrous for Belgium's future.

Africa sows 'seeds of its survival'

LESOTHO DIARY
Clyde Sanger

WITHOUT difficulty we persuaded Lerato Kose, a plant biologist two years out of the National University of Lesotho, to pose for a photograph beside a spiral aloe. The spiral aloe is the national flower, unique to this mountain kingdom.

The flower has been protected by law since 1969, but it is threatened with extinction. Too many have been dug up for sale to tourists, and many other plants were lost when waters were impounded behind the Katse Dam last year.

Appropriately, Lerato is working in the government's conservation department. Every other month she makes a six-hour journey to check on the rare plant collection in her charge at the Sehlabathebe national park.

Dr Steve Ralitsoele, the director of agricultural research, is also a plant protection man. Challenged by visitors in a workshop, he says that the spiral aloe also has practical uses. British troops used it to disinfect their wounds, and many Basotho believe the aloe protects them from lightning.

The workshop is about the major food crops in southern Africa and the disappearance of indigenous plants, of which the spiral aloe becomes symbolic. The participants from 11 African countries have no faith in the Green Revolution that has swept their governments into accepting the Sasakwa 2000 programme.

This Japanese aid package of hybrid maize comes complete with herbicides, pesticides and subsidised fertiliser, accompanied with skilful promotion. They claim increased yields, enough even to reverse a 25-year decline in per capita food production in Africa and lead to self-sufficiency.

It is not working out that way. Emmanuel Antwi of Ghana says these imported hybrids perform well for perhaps only four years before the soil is depleted and the crops demand ever more fertiliser. Meanwhile the International Monetary Fund has stepped in with structural adjustment, requiring subsidies to be cut. The small-scale farmers cannot afford fertiliser at soaring costs and have often abandoned traditional seeds for these hybrids that are now failing them.

Antwi, who runs the Ghana Organic Agriculture Network, sees opportunity in this disillusionment. The national gene bank has a good collection of indigenous seeds, or landraces, and he is planning to multiply these on some farms that his network will make into demonstration sites. But it will be a long road back to sustainable farming.

The three wise men at the Lesotho workshop are Ethiopian scientists who over nearly 20 years have shown it can be done. When famine raged in the early 1980s, Dr Melaku Worede gave farmers imported grain in order to save the indigenous seeds which they were eating in desperation. To him this sorghum and wheat and téff was a heritage to treasure, adapted over centuries to tolerate drought and diseases that destroy the hybrids. His critics said these landraces could never match the yields of imported varieties. But Dr Tesfaye Tessema bred "composites" of durum wheat from farmers' fields that far outperformed imported wheat.

Success has its dangers. The Ethiopian government saw this programme, supported by a foreign donor, USC Canada, as competition and last year took everything over.

It is finding other homes — in Mali, Senegal and, it seems, Lesotho. The "seeds of survival" have fallen on fertile ground here.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

THE totals given for those killed by Stalin, Mao or Pol Pot usually include deaths from starvation as a result of social and economic policy. While Britain's Indian empire was a thriving concern, famines were not unusual, so can any imperial figures be counted among history's mass murderers?

ABSOLUTELY not. China, which escaped imperial control, suffered even worse famines than India in the 19th century, and continued to suffer them for the first three decades of the 20th century. By this time India, though still subject to occasional devastating epidemics, had effectively banished famine, at least in peace-time.

Indian famines in the 19th century were essentially climatically driven. For most of the year, most of India has little rainfall, but sometimes the intensely wet monsoon season fails, and if there is insufficient stored water, crops fail. When irrigation is inadequate, roads are almost non-existent, and the transport of food is dependent on oxen, famine relief is almost impossible.

The British in India, whatever their faults, gave much thought to the problem of preventing drought turning into famine. By the 1880s, when the rains failed, an established programme for dealing with famine relief was well established. — *Colin Crouch, Harrow Weald, Middlesex*

MOST dictionaries define famine as "an extreme scarcity of food". We should not concede that there was a famine in either mid-19th century Ireland or during Stalin's collectivisation programme. Both cases of mass hunger and population exterminations resulted from deliberate government policy to enforce, at bayonet point, the export of huge amounts of local foodstuffs for profitable sale on international markets.

There is no distinction between the two episodes in terms of knowledge of what was going on. If Stalin was a mass murderer, as he surely was, so was Lord John Russell. — *Michael Napier, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

HAS anyone ever *seriously* researched time travel?

JW DUNNE'S Experiment With Time was not concerned with time travel, as Peter Sharp seems to suggest (April 26). It was an attempt to explain the sensation of *déjà vu* and apparent precognition. He kept notes of dreams and re-interpreted them to fit later events. His explanatory theory depended on the idea of time flowing like a river, on the banks of which the dreamer stood in Time 2, observing the flotsam of Time 1 events approaching and departing. This leads to an infinite regression of serial times, T3, T4, etc, and conflicts with the idea of space-time within which events occur rather than being swept along by a current. — *Martin Simons, Stepney, South Australia*

Any answers?

WHEN was food first preserved in tin cans? — *Bob Davies, Crow's Nest, New South Wales, Australia*

WHAT is the origin of the phrase "Scot-free"? — *J Avery, Edinburgh*

EVERY biography of Michael Faraday says that he was a Sandemanian, which I gather is some sort of Christian sect. What do or did Sandemanians believe? — *William Laing, Sydney, Australia*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/+44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ. The Notes & Queries website is at http://nq.guardian.co.uk/

A Country Diary

Mary Kille

TASMANIA: The rays of the rising sun slant through the stringybarks and blackwoods, and across the cleared grass where the wallabies and pademelons browse. An Eastern spinebill, the most striking of all honeyeaters, moves from one scarlet correa to another, inserting its long delicate bill deep into the tubular flowers for a morning feast of nectar.

Over the sea, a group of white-faced herons share a thermal with a white-bellied sea eagle. The eagle breaks away from the circling herons, and glides over the sea, alone and magnificent. We look down on that astonishing back, the brilliant white of its head, and that huge wing-span, with the steely-grey feathers of an adult bird, its wings held in a smooth upswept curve, as it scans the sea for a fish; but its great talons are empty as it veers away from the sea, up, over the bush, towards its nest on the far side of the promontory. Now a sentinel forest raven flies to interrupt the eagle's silent flight, and is soon joined by a raucous group of other ravens, escorting the eagle from their territory.

Eagle spotting is easy; so often their presence is betrayed by the behaviour of other birds. The two wedge-tailed eagles we see almost daily are continually harried noisily by the ravens. The brown goshawk and the peregrine falcon announce their presence with high-pitched screams, and last year the importuning cry of a young peregrine heralded the sight of the parent, closely followed by the youngster. That cry is usually for food, but we witnessed the proving flight of the youngster last year. The parent's immaculate, economical flying contrasted with the out-of-control aeronautical display of its offspring, and its constant, ear-piercing screams.

The rosy clouds on the sea horizon remind us of the smoke clouds we had watched a few weeks ago, slowly drifting towards our part of the coast, from a huge fire that burned out a large part of the nearby national park. Many hectares of the park, a precious flower reserve, are now a blackened desert.

We understand clearly that the price of living in virgin eucalyptus bushland is the annual possibility of fire, and we check our fire hoses and guttering yet again. But a few days of anxiety when fire risk prevails is the price we pay for the privilege of looking down on eagles.



On yer bike . . . Paul Ford on his jet-powered bicycle PHOTOGRAPH: TONY JEDREJ

Inventor powers his bike into history

INTOLERABLY noisy, a fire hazard and not fit for use on public highways — as mad inventions go, this rates highly, *writes Amelia Gentleman*.

Cambridge engineer Paul Ford has fitted a home-designed jet engine to his bicycle and created a potentially record-breaking machine capable of travelling at 100mph. Aside from its speed, the vehicle does have a couple of advantages: there is no need to pedal, and jet paraffin is affordably priced.

But even the inventor accepts that these attractions are outweighed by the problems the prototype bike poses. It emits 102 decibels when stationary, and when it gets going it sounds like an aeroplane on take-off.

Then there is the heat. "The exhaust emerges at about 480C — hot enough to burn the hairs off your body," Mr Ford warns.

Mr Ford, aged 37, co-owner of a model aircraft shop in Cambridge, invented the miniature gas turbine engine.

During preliminary tests at a disused airfield, the vehicle reached 55mph at half power and Mr Ford is confident that, with a bit of work, 100mph will be reached easily.

"I've been too scared to go any faster. The steering is extremely sensitive, something else that needs refining . . . I was also concerned that it might actually take off, but the design seems to have prevented that risk."

While happy to accept that his invention is not practical, Mr Ford remains uncomfortable with the mad professor status the creation has forced on him.

"I'm pretty certain that this is the first jet-powered bike in Britain. People thought it couldn't be done, and I wanted to prove them wrong."

He adds: "A lot of people have told me that it's a crazy thing to try to do, but I don't think it's eccentric at all."

Letter from Bali David Mitchell

Indonesia's paradise lost

PUTU emphatically punches the calculator keys for a third time to demonstrate his parlous financial state.

He works the nightshift on one of the sand-marooned island bars on the beach at Kuta, Bali, the very centre of 20 years of aggressive tourist industry development and packaged dreams. Putu is determined to show me again the gulf between his monthly income of 110,000 rupiah ($12) and his expenses of 240,000 rupiah ($26) for lodging, food and petrol for his motorbike.

"Clothes! Girlfriend! I don't even think about them," he says, sucking on his teeth, the Indonesian sign of frustration and resignation.

His monthly shortfall is occasionally made up of tips and the offer to act as a guide to his home town of Singaradja, on the dryer, poorer north Bali coast. Tonight, I am one of two customers at the bar between 9pm and midnight.

Kuta Beach serves as an interesting weather vane of the current, decidedly chilly, economic climate in Indonesia. Over the last 20 years more than a billion dollars has poured into this part of Bali, financing hundreds of small businesses in the tourism sector. Unhappily, the jumbled and unco-ordinated developments have left Kuta a warren of underserviced roads and paths: broken and difficult to negotiate, overflowing with backed up septic systems in rain, hot and dusty when dry, and thronged with hundreds of street hawkers at all times.

Since the decline of the economy business in Kuta has been *sepih*, (quiet). Since the end of Ramadan, the hawkers have been joined by their unemployed friends and relatives from Java. Bargaining with tourists has gained a slightly more aggressive edge, and the *obeng* (screwdriver) has come into its own as the device of choice in the increasing number of burglaries. In ancillary tourism industries the quality of services and maintenance has declined noticeably. In restaurants, menus have been drastically simplified in response to the disappearance of imported foodstuffs.

However, it is not only the informal fringes of Bali's tourist economy that are suffering at the moment. In Denpasar, Bali's provincial capital, Irah and Sastro both work in one of the typically urban-based, tertiary service sector industries that arose in the Indonesia of the 1990s. They earn between 700,000 ($77)and 1,000,000 rupiah ($110) a month, have been with their company for four years, and, unlike many acquaintances, still hold their jobs. Polytechnic-educated, car-owning, credit card-holding beneficiaries of the boom, they have been left gasping by the flood of bad economic news of recent months.

Like many colleagues, both Irah and Sastro have started to bring a simple lunch from home instead of patronising one of the *warung* (food stalls) on the streets around their office. Sastro has a wife and daughter to provide for and so has reduced his number of meals to two a day. He has visibly lost weight. Another of their colleagues shaves his head to save on the cost of shampoo, which has increased in price by 200 per cent.

The need to make these seemingly petty savings, sometimes joked about but undertaken with a determined rigour, forcefully indicate to Irah and Sastro the rapid weakening of their buying power. Such an understanding, concomitant with increasingly noisy demonstrations against the regime and open questioning of it in the media, may have begun the politicisation of this group.

Irah, commenting on the now daily press recitation of the cronyism, corruption and collusion trinity, says: "Never before did I ever think about politics, never before. Now, I'm so embarrassed by what I hear." She is upset that Indonesia has been brought to a state of international ignominy by its leaders.

Sastro, for the first time, has started to read the local and international news magazines to which his firm subscribes. He has even taken to photocopying and distributing articles to his workmates.

The impression gained from them is a mix of dawning realisation of the retreat of certainty, badly shaken confidence and odd bursts of naive, yet waning hope. The New Order has left them utterly unprepared for change, let alone the shocks of the past year.

I often go to Kuta for a surf, just after sunrise. Some of the bars are shut, although they used to be open 24 hours a day. Dozens of people, including very young families, are stirring from their grubby sleep in the sands. After washing themselves in the sea, they drift back into the *kampungs*, hunting for some sort of breakfast. And Nehru called Bali "The Morning of the World".

Will wonder drugs never cease?

Natasha Walter

"*I HAVE* been using Viagra for the past 10 days," says Bill. "At 71, I act like I'm on honeymoon. It is the answer."

"I used my second 100mg tablet of Viagra today," says Pete. "Everything worked perfectly. Whoopee!"

"I tried 50mg of Viagra," says Ted, aged 55. "Within one hour I have very good results. This looks like a winner! The wife is out so I call up my collection of pornographic pictures."

Some 10,000 prescriptions are now being written every week in the United States for Viagra, the new cure for male impotence. And men are clogging newsgroups on the Internet to report their glee and to share ideas about how to get the drug more quickly. One doctor, who was prepared to prescribe it over the telephone, sent out 600 prescriptions in a fortnight. This is the new wonder drug.

And who wants to spoil their fun? If men of 71 want to pretend they're on honeymoon and men of 55 want to masturbate over pornography, who should stop them? This party could run and run.

But, whisper it softly, wonder drugs do have a way of turning out to be poisoned apples. Up to now, it has usually been women who have gagged on that knowledge. Because women are used to being told that there is a pill for every problem they face, and women have believed the experts time and time again, only to wake up the next morning with a bad headache — or worse.

Since the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1957, the popularity of Valium in the sixties and the excitement over HRT in the eighties, women have been encouraged to believe that doctors have a magic bullet in their black bags to make every stage of their lives easier, better and happier.

Men, on the other hand, have long been expected to take whatever life threw at them on the chin. Are they now falling for the idea that there might be a pill out there that will take them, with a single swallow, into priapic bliss?

Women have learned that the Pill would not deliver sexual nirvana; that HRT would not give them eternal youth; that Valium would not give them happiness

Perhaps they should look at the history of women's wonder drugs, and realise that all these pills tend to arrive on a wave of optimism and frenetic eagerness, only to thump straight into disappointment and scepticism.

Take, if you will, the contraceptive pill. Dr Gregory Pincus, who spearheaded the development of the Pill, was inundated with hundreds of letters from grateful women. As Linda Grant says in her book Sexing The Millennium: "They hailed him as a god; they believed that science could at last liberate them from the chains their desires had forged." But the high-dosage pills that were prescribed then led to a myriad of side-effects: dizziness, nausea and headaches, for a start; and even heart disease, urinary infections and thrombosis.

Hugh Davis, professor of obstetrics at John Hopkins university in Washington DC, noted in 1969 that in the promotional materials that accompanied the Pill: "I saw pictures of roses, tulips and peach blossoms. I saw not a word about thorns or worms." Only years later, after the National Women's Health Network lobbied to force drug companies to include lists of side-effects, were the Pill's risks admitted and women able to balance the fun against knowledge of the drawbacks.

Or take hormone replacement therapy (HRT). One of its most enthusiastic proponents, Dr Robert Wilson, saw the menopause not as a part of every woman's normal life, but as "a serious, painful, often crippling disease" that could be cured. He saw HRT as the way into endless youth: "The outward signs of this age-defying youthfulness are a straight-backed posture, supple breast contours, taut, smooth skin, firm muscles, and that particular vigour and grace typical of a healthy female."

In fact, studies show that a significant proportion of menopausal women either never feel the need for HRT, find it doesn't help them, or find that it gives them adverse symptoms. "Women's use of HRT is still a long way from justifying the promoters' optimism," Germaine Greer noted drily in The Change.

Or take tranquillisers. They have never been solely a woman's drug, but as Princess Diana — of all people — once reminded us, women still tend to receive three times as many prescriptions for tranquillisers as men do. During the sixties the benzodiazepines were heavily marketed as drugs that clever men would give to miserable women. Advertisements told doctors, "Now SHE can cope," or showed a man's hand cradling a woman's wrist with the slogan, "Whatever the diagnosis, Librium".

The real stresses of women's lives were to be smoothed over with a magical, soothing drug that turned out to be addictive and to trigger unforeseen withdrawal symptoms.

Women have learned that the Pill would not deliver sexual nirvana; HRT would not give them eternal youth; Valium would not give them happiness. It would be tragic to see men now falling for the tantalising promises of the medical establishment to cure all the disappointments of life.

Once upon a time it was possible for men to admit that they could welcome the onset of old age and the loss of sexual vigour. Sophocles said coolly: "When the fierce tensions of the passions and desires relax, we are rid of many mad masters." Now, he would be sent off to his doctor for a good dose of Viagra to pep him up.

But nothing will trick recalcitrant, mortal bodies into perfection. Already, the newly potent men on the Internet stand beside some scary tales: "Facial pressure . . . heart pounding . . . pain at base of skull . . . heartburn . . . yellow shift when looking at a white screen . . ." is how one man described the side-effects of Viagra. And the men who are laughing about taking the drug two or three times a day should be wary. "These men may end up injuring themselves and becoming permanently impotent," said Dr John Milhall from Loyola university.

What is more, although Viagra may look like the answer, let's remember that it is an answer for one, limited question, and that question is not "Will I be happy?" but just "Will I be hard?" Even with Viagra, desire and desirability will turn out to be as elusive as ever. Although a spoonful of sugar may help the medicine go down, a pinch of salt is always in order. — *The Observer*

Birdsong's ancient magic

Paul Evans



ILLUSTRATION: BARRY LARKING

CHIFF-CHAFF, chiff-chaff . . . It's four o'clock in the morning and this warbler named after its stubbornly minimalist song seems to be questioning my sanity. And well it might. On the very edge of the darkest hour, I'm wandering up a mountain in the rain. It feels like an out-of-body experience. It's as if down there, below the trees and drizzle, my real body lies still as a log, watched over by the town's orange streetlights. Up here, my astral wraith stalks the wooded hill in a dream of listening.

Listening is like entering into a secret pact. To do it we must slough off the row and racket that encrusts our waking lives and step into the city of birds whose alien language we cannot decipher but must understand intuitively. The time before daybreak, when we're most vulnerable, is a time when we may also be most perceptive, if we open ourselves to the dawn raid of birdsong.

In the dark, dripping, misty woods, the blackbirds, thrushes, robins, warblers and wrens sing with a dream-like quality. Because of the rain and low cloud, dawn does not "break" but insinuates itself from the east in a gradual bleaching of the sky. Somewhere above the clouds the moon is full, powering spring tides. There are tides of sea and there are less tangible tides of the land: of regeneration, procreation, flowering and leafing. There is also a tide of the northward movement of birds. Winter visitors have flown back to the tundra and summer visitors are arriving.

Migrant birds from the south, such as wheatears and whinchats, reclaim the hilltop while warblers and whitethroats take to the woods. They sweep north with Mediterranean and African voices. This birdsong is not just about the "get off my land" demarcation of territory or the "come and get me" transfer of genes from dominant males. It's a proclamation of existence and exuberance of spirit, a defiance even. When there's not enough light to risk flight there is also little risk of predators. So it is the time for the all-consuming business of mating, nest-building and food gathering for hatching broods.

In the "old style" calendar, this full moon marks the eve of the Celtic festival of Beltane, the Mayday spring festival of fertility. Until the mid-18th century, Britain had two calendars operating simultaneously: the "old style" Julian calendar, which was closely linked to the natural rhythms of the seasons and celebrations of nature, and the "new style" Georgian calendar which was not. In 1751 the "new style" was declared the only legal calendar and this shuffled natural events forwards by 11 days. Perhaps it was also meant to sever links with our pagan past. Birds of course took no notice, wild nature sings to its own ancient rhythms.

The people who lived within the earthworks on the top of this mountain 3,000 years ago would have known this day and recognised the same songs from the ancestors of these birds. They would share their place as they shared their mythology with the birds. They would not have thought it weird to wander the woods in a wet dawn to listen. Because birds were central to divination, they would be listening for the future. Without these birdsongs it would not be dawn, day would not begin, the woods would not wake in the rain, and we would sleep in ignorance for ever under the streetlights.

Chess Leonard Barden

MICHAEL ADAMS, unofficially ranked world No 8, has a real opportunity to break into the top five at a grandmaster tournament in Madrid this month.

The British co-champion is five Fide points behind Gata Kamsky of the United States, who has abandoned chess in favour of a medical career; and 10 adrift of Vassily Ivanchuk and Anatoly Karpov. The world top quartet of Garry Kasparov, Vishy Anand, Vlad Kramnik and Alexei Shirov are way ahead, but if Adams can win in Spain or even finish runner-up, he will almost certainly leapfrog over Karpov, Ivanchuk and Kamsky.

Kasparov meanwhile has just completed a match of his own, winning 4-0 at rapid play against Bulgaria's world No 9, Veselin Topalov, in Sofia; and announced a six-game series with Jan Timman in Prague.

In contrast to Adams, the veteran Timman has really milked his intermittent status as a leading Western challenger. At one time he played an annual series against top GMs, including matches against Karpov, Nigel Short and Kasparov (to whom he lost 1-5).

Timman followed the example of his fellow Dutchman Max Euwe, whose contests against the top men such as Capablanca and Bogolyubov paved the way for his 1935 world title challenge to Alekhine. Euwe surprisingly won, triggering a national chess boom in the Netherlands which has lasted to this day.

Euwe's own model was the great Emanuel Lasker, who as a virtual unknown in 1890-3 won a series of mini-matches against no-hopers and veterans with the objective of securing a title match with the ageing Wilhelm Steinitz.

So the time is surely ripe for Adams, fairly unexposed against the world's top players, to follow the route of Euwe and Lasker. Is he equal to it? Scots will be sceptical, after Jonathan Rowson cracked up in several good positions in their recent match. But Lasker in his time liked to take his games to a tactical precipice, relying on his strong nerves in a crisis, and that's also what happens here.

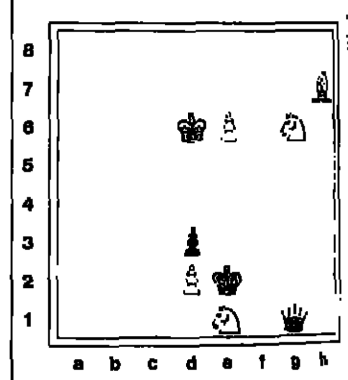
Rowson Adams

5th game 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8 9 a4 Be7 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Be3 He played 12 f4 in the first game of the match.

a6 13 Na3 f5 14 f3 f4 15 Bf2 Qe8 16 Nc4 Qh5 17 Kh1 Rf6 18 g4 fxg3ep 19 Bxg3 Rg6 20 f4 Qh6 21 Qe1 Nf6 22 fxe5 Ne4 23 Ra3 Rxg3 24 Rxg3 Bh4 25 Rgf3? Black has invested material in return for a bamboozling pin, and White's escape(Bxe1?? 26 Rf8 mate) is only temporary. The right idea was 25 Kg1! Bh3 26 Rf3 Bxg3 27 hxg3 dxe5 28 Re3 Ng5 29 Nxe5 Re8 30 g4 with advantage.

Bg4 26 R3f2 Nxf2+ 27 Rxf2 Bxf2 28 Qxf2 Rf8 29 Qe1 Qh3 30 Resigns.

No 2524



White mates in four moves against any defence (by H Gomoluch, Hamburg 1947). Clue if you're polylingual: the German term for what happens in this week's solution is *Hineinziehungsopfer*.

No 2523: 1 Nc5! b2 2 Nb3+ Kb1 3 Nd2+ Kc1 Ka2 4 Ra6 mate. **4 Nc4 Kb1** If b1Q 5 Rg6 mates or wins the Q. **5 Ke2 c1Q 6 Nd2+ Ka2 7 Ra6 mate.** Not 1 Nc3? b2 2 Ke2 b1Q 3 Nxb1 Kb2! 4 Rb6+ Kc1 draws (by A Sochniev, 1992)

Quick crossword no. 419

Across

1 Method — of betting? (6)
4 Current (6)
8 Clear, easily understood (5)
9 Thickness (7)
10 Impartial (7)
11 Problem — children (5)
12 Royal Yacht (9)
17 Hooded snake (5)
19 Breathe — fire (7)
21 Speech (7)
22 Marriage (5)
23 Epistle (6)
24 Ravine (6)

Down

1 Soundless (6)
2 Give way under pressure (7)
3 Senior (5)
5 Stress (7)
6 Social problems (5)
7 Chaos (6)
9 Spotted dog (9)
13 Fancy — a Lennon song (7)
14 Nimbleness (7)
15 Train — for Rugby, eg? (6)
16 Long flag, often tapering (6)
18 Curse — the result of an explosion (5)
20 Finnish steam-bath (5)

Last week's solution

DISORDERLY
R T A L E S
MAGAZINE GATE
F D L V A U
TRIP FAILURE
U G T D
CAMPANOLOGY
A N R R
PLUMAGE SCUM
L U L T H A
DEAF INSTANCE
R T N A R H
DIDGERIDOO

Bridge Zia Mahmood

WHEN a man called Plato walked into TGR's and announced that he'd like to play in the high-stake game, we all sat up. Anyone with that name, we thought, must possess far more than the ordinary level of wisdom. Of course, he was made welcome, and we asked whether he'd played much before. "Oh, two or three times," he said, and we smiled, for this is the mock-modest sort of answer you'd expect from an expert player. It turned out, however, to be nothing less than the literal truth. Plato had played bridge precisely three times in his life before sitting down to play for £100 per hundred in the fiercest rubber bridge game in the world.

It wasn't long before I cut Plato as my partner. On the first hand of the Chicago, I opened with a strong no trump after a pass on my right. There was another pass on my left. Plato studied his hand for a while with all the calm detachment of his famous namesake. Then he smiled and declaimed "Two diamonds!" It was obvious that, despite having made a bid recognised the world over as a sign of weakness, Plato in fact held one of the best hands of his short career. With tongue firmly in cheek, I asked the club's proprietor — who happened to be my right-hand opponent — whether it would be in order for me to bid seven no trumps, or six at the very least. Of course, I was told that I must do the honourable thing, so I passed. Plato at least managed the play in two diamonds adequately, and we recorded the unusual score of 40 below the line and 100 above it.

On the next deal, I held these cards:

♠KQ5 ♥AQ43 ♦QJ6 ♣KJ10

After two passes, I opened the obvious 3NT, hoping that Plato would have some bits and pieces so that I would have a play for the contract. When this came back to the proprietor, he made a typical sporting double — he knew I was guessing, and he was hoping to make me pay. I redoubled, for it is vital not to lose face in these situations — losing money is of secondary importance.

Alas, Plato had the kind of hand on which he really ought to have made a weak takeout of a 1NT opening:

♠6432 ♥J10965 ♦87 ♣65

The jack of spades was led to the ace, and a spade was returned. Winning with the king, I laid down the ace of hearts. Now, if this had been the ideal world envisaged by the great philosopher, the king would have fallen and I would have emerged with nine tricks — five hearts, three spades and one club. Unfortunately, the king of hearts was guarded in the proprietor's hand, so I had to lose a trick to it. A spade was continued, but mercifully the suit divided 3-3. So, I took four hearts, three spades and an eventual club trick to escape for one down in three no trumps redoubled and a penalty of 200 points.

Not so bad. We'd played a grand slam in a part score, and a part score in a redoubled game, and we were still just 60 points behind on aggregate with a useful 40 below. As if to reward me for my virtuous pass of two diamonds on the first deal, the Goddess of bridge then dealt our side two laydown games. We played them both in part scores rather than slams, the upshot of which was that playing bridge for the fourth time in his life, Plato had won a six-point Chicago in the big game at TGR's. Perhaps next week he'll take up tennis, in which case my money's on him for the men's singles title at Wimbledon.

Fruit of the sea . . . an octopus is tenderised in Stonetown, Tanzania. Fernando Moleres's photograph comes from the World Press Photo Yearbook 1998, published by Thames and Hudson (£12.95 pbk)

National affronts

Robin Blackburn

Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conflict with Tribal People
by Mark Cocker
Jonathan Cape 416pp £20

IN AN age of supposedly ethical foreign policy and official apologies for historic crimes it is no bad thing to have an avowedly ethical history. Some commentators still seem to believe that in tallying up the murderous record of modern civilisation we only need scrutinise the record of Nazism and communism. The contributions to mass murder and misery made by those in the vanguard of Western advance, from the 16th century to the most recent times, are typically ignored.

Mark Cocker's book makes salutary reading against this background, reminding those who inherit the privileges of the Western way of life of the dreadful price paid for it by the countless millions who were trampled underfoot as the West waxed more prosperous.

Cocker takes four widely separated cases of European conquest and colonisation, seeking to establish the motives and mindset of those responsible: the Spanish conquest of Central and South America; the near-exterminatory colonisation of North America; the wiping out of the Tasmanian peoples by the British; and the murderous subjugation of South-West Africa by the Germans.

In each case it would have been perfectly possible for the West to have established peaceful relationships with these peoples, and in each case the option for conquest, justified in terms of spreading Christian civilisation, entailed catastrophic results for the conquered because of their special vulnerability.

European colonisation, the first wave of globalisation, revealed an ugly mixture of greed and arrogance. Cocker is good at portraying the racialising mentalities that permitted the conquerors to see their victims as beast-like lesser species, which must gave way to the white man or perish. At a number of points he establishes chilling parallels between modern colonial racism, with its exterminist ambitions, and the ideology of the Final Solution.

While Cocker is surely right to register the special responsibility of racial ideologies, the carnage of the first world war and the terror-bombing of civilians in the second were to show that nationalist militarism could have vicious results even in conflicts with fellow Europeans.

The peculiar character of European colonialism, racism and militarism paradoxically stemmed from the fact that the continent had no embracing empire, but was instead the cockpit for those competitive apparatuses of power and wealth known as feudalism, capitalism and the nation state.

This eloquently written and well-researched book serves as a necessary corrective to triumphalist and evasive histories of the rise of the West — and also to the contemporary English tendency to retreat into a narrow concern with our own "island story". Cocker does not idealise the victims of Western expansionism, making it clear that they sometimes exhibited traits of cruelty and rapacity that were inferior to those of the Europeans only in means and social organisation. Without sentimentality or special pleading he draws attention both to authentically noble features of the resistance offered by the colonised and to the witness and opposition offered by a few Europeans.

My main reservation about Cocker's argument concerns his discussion of those who opposed the barbarities of colonisation.

Some of those Cocker calls the European "mediators" smoothed the path of conquest, but others, like Las Casas in Spanish America, did become outright opponents of the core processes of colonisation. Of course it is easy to find fault with the anti-imperialists, but we should first acknowledge the debt owed by our own hindsight to their wisdom. An excess of political correctness should not stop us recognising that it was the campaigns of Las Casas and other anti-imperialists, and the resistance of doomed natives, which constructed the moral ground on which we ourselves now tread.

A personal duel by mass proxy

Vitali Vitaliev

Stalingrad
by Antony Beevor
Viking 494pp £25

STALINGRAD stands out among mainstream military histories. Anthony Beevor portrays the war not as a conflict of faceless numbered armies, run by commanders from the safety of their bunkers, but — primarily — as a tremendous human tragedy, which, in the words of Leo Tolstoy, is a stark contradiction to human nature. The commanders, after all, are only involved in a war, whereas ordinary soldiers and civilians are committed. The difference between "involved" and "committed" was once colourfully explained by General Norman Schwarzkopf: "Take bacon and eggs. Chickens are involved, but pigs are committed."

The narrative of Stalingrad is captivating, even for someone like myself who takes little interest in military matters. Apart from revealing some previously undisclosed facts behind the last war's greatest battle, Beevor has skilfully incorporated into the book thousands of sparkling "human interest" details: a trapped Russian soldier watching "the German searchlights playing on the clouds" and wondering whether he would ever see his sweetheart again; a German military doctor, whose most precious possession was a leather-bound volume of Goethe's Faust; a romantic young commander of a Soviet reconnaissance party who spots "a white mug with a rose on it" while inspecting the abandoned German trenches, gets taken by its beauty, "because he had not seen a completely civilian object for so long", and keeps thinking about it as he later lies wounded in the snow.

One is tempted to forget that these are not Tolstoyan literary metaphors, but painstakingly selected facts from eyewitness accounts, soldiers' letters and other archival documents.

The effect of presence is also achieved with the help of masterly descriptions: "The steppe between the Don and Volga, stone-hard in the summer drought, offered fast going. Tank commanders standing in their turrets, wearing goggles against the dust, had to keep an eye out ahead for a hidden *balka* or gully that might not be visible to the driver . . . The slightly rolling terrain of dry, rough grass seemed eerily empty . . ." If you read this passage aloud, you will hear the muffled roar of the dust-covered German tanks rattling along the bumpy roads of the unknown and alien land which they have so recklessly invaded.

THE attraction of Stalingrad does not lie in its literary merits alone. Beevor makes it clear that the battle of Stalingrad was but a "personal duel by mass proxy". By "personal duel" he means the deadly confrontation of Stalin and Hitler — the 20th century's most barbarous dictators. It is for their crazy ambitions of global domination that millions of human lives had to be sacrificed on both sides.

The sad historical truth is that Hitler's military machine could be stopped and destroyed only by an even more atrocious totalitarian monster. And although both warring parties were implicated in unspeakable crimes against civilians, it was only Stalin who treated *his own forces* like enemies — with unparalleled cruelty and cynicism. During the battle of Stalingrad, 13,500 Soviet soldiers were executed for desertion, cowardice and incompetence.

From the start of the war, Stalin introduced an unwritten cannibalistic rule, according to which any Soviet prisoner-of-war was automatically branded a traitor — he even publicly denounced his own son, who was captured by the Germans and died in captivity. No wonder the Germans were able to assemble a 50,000-strong Russian army to fight on their side at Stalingrad — a fact which had been zealously concealed by Soviet propaganda.

Soviet military commanders had to live in constant fear of repression, too. Senior officers were routinely arrested and executed on the orders of the Stavka (Stalin's war-time headquarters) at the slightest sign of disobedience or dissent, whereas, as Beevor points out, in the first stages of the war the Germans "would not have dared to do anything worse to a senior officer who objected than remove him from his command".

In a battle of two tyrants, it is the vilest of the two who normally wins. This, of course, does not minimise the heroism of ordinary soldiers, even if that heroism was often triggered by fear and despair. Beevor quotes a German division commander as saying: "Strong point after strong point has to be taken individually . . . As often as not, we cannot get them [Soviet soldiers] out even with flame-throwers, and we have to blow the whole thing to bits."

The skyline of modern Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad) is dominated by a gigantic (and fairly ugly) statue of the sword-wielding "Russian Motherland". Underneath the statue, in a small memorial museum in Mamayev Kurgan, thousands and thousands of names are engraved in gold letters on marble walls — the names of the victims of Stalingrad. Jingoistic statues never pay a proper tribute to the dead, but honest books, like this one, certainly do.

If you would like to order this book at the special price of £20 contact CultureShop

Going blue in the face

Jim White

Manchester United Ruined My Life
by Colin Shindler
Headline 310pp £14.99

ACCORDING to Colin Shindler there is a conspiracy abroad. It consists of Manchester United-supporting, Manchester Grammar School-educated, south Manchester gentiles whose purpose is to make his life — that of a Manchester City-supporting, Bury Grammar School-educated, north Manchester Jew — a misery. Everywhere he looks there they are, with their smug sense of superiority, suffering none of the tortures he puts himself through. This conspiracy has, the title of his autobiography suggests, informed Shindler's entire life.

As if to confirm everything he has always thought, it will come as no surprise to the author that this reviewer is a Manchester United-supporting, Manchester Grammar School-educated, south Manchester gentile. Only one thing about the arrangement will go against all the fatalistic assumptions of Shindler's world view: this particular member of the faction most likely to do him down liked his book.

Such is the unedifying plethora of Nick Hornby-wannabes, I promised myself that if another book which begins "you think it's easy supporting Falkirk" arrived, the middle man would be missed out and it would head straight for the fire.

Shindler has been a highly successful television producer — he brought us Lovejoy, no less — but his attempt to mine the apparently exhausted seam was destined to head straight there, particularly since the proof copy arrived decorated with the words "Bill Bryson meets Nick Hornby in this hilarious account of a man whose passion for sport defies all logic". Until, that is, as I leant forward over the grate, I happened to read the opening chapter, which begins with an anecdote of such comic potency it would be a crime to paraphrase it here.

Colin Shindler overcomes all the hurdles because his prose is never less than sharp, smart and easy on the eye. True, there may be one too many match reports, one too many references to sixties' student life. But from the off, his *schtick* — that of the outsider delivered the trickiest of hands by being made a blue as well as a Jew — binds it all together.

Shindler's style is too gentle, too intelligent for simple invective. Indeed his writing is so attractive, this particular member of the smug, superior conspiracy would be thrilled to read more. His account of Manchester City's opening away game in next season's second division (at Macclesfield, perhaps) would — almost certainly — bring a smile to my lips.



Lesson for the tabloids

Andrew O'Hagan

Cries Unheard
by Gitta Sereny
Macmillan 393pp £20

THERE is nothing more stupid and corrupt than the collective mind of Britain's tabloid newspapers. Nothing more creeping. In a spirit of moral outrage — of common good — they set out to molest the very people who often require protection, sympathy, understanding. The cry of the mob is vicious and total. In full heat it has a degree of what used to be called the killer instinct.

That is something Mary Bell never had. She was just a sickened little girl. Her even sicker mother tried to kill her, and she put her into bed with naked men and whips, and made her feel like nothing. In 1968 the girl put her hands around the necks of two poor infants, and she squeezed. She didn't know what murder was. She thought the boys would be back in time for tea. In terms of human suffering, it would not be easy to think of anyone who had been through more than Mary Bell, not even the boys she killed, nor their families, or the millions of readers who are now shouting about common decency. The people who do so, and who continue to demonise that damaged little girl, and who now pursue her as a woman, and inflict damage on her own child, are tormentors of a more deliberate kind than she ever was. They are adults hurting a child.

Yet it was not the tabloids or the public who exposed the adult Mary Bell to all of this. It was Gitta Sereny. It was a writer who thought Bell's full story would make a great book. It is not easy to understand how she let it happen. For Mary Bell, and for the daughter she dotes on, the girl who every day redeems something of the marred little girl Mary used to be, the business of this book has opened up a whole new nightmare. Reasonably good books are worth something, but they are not worth this.

Gitta Sereny is no novice. She'd been publishing long enough to understand publicity and hypocrisy and the price of things. It can only be regretted that she did not reckon the price to be too high in this case. One can only be astonished that she didn't do more to protect the subject of her writing life.

Mary Bell had once tried to write a book herself. If Sereny was properly interested in the woman Mary Bell — and not in a bestseller — she would have helped her to say what she needed to say in her own book, something she had somehow never managed to say. The best parts of Sereny's book are the parts where Bell speaks for herself. Why did Sereny not see this, and help the young woman to help herself? (One of Sereny's few advisers, Dr Virginia Wilking, "bluntly" advised Sereny to give up on the effort altogether: "She was concerned over the unrelenting intensity of these sessions which would normally, under therapeutic treatment conditions, have probably stretched over a period of years.") But Sereny, interested in the public good, continued with the questions.

Her ambition carried her forward — and her hope that the book might change the way we deal with child killers. An admirable goal in itself. But it cannot excuse her deplorable misjudgments. Why did she need to have the book serialised in a newspaper? If she really felt the need to pay Mary, why did she then have to tell people about it? It appears that Sereny couldn't bear the thought that people would think she was exploiting Mary. But she did exploit her. And in ways much subtler, and more severe, than not giving her part of her earnings. It mocks our system of justice if someone is to be punished to infinity for a crime they served their time on, and which they committed at the age of 11.

THE money question is important for two other reasons. The first is that Sereny and her publishers should have known, if they know anything, that the victims' families would be offended by it, and the papers, and the Prime Minister even, would follow suit. The life of Mary Bell and her family would be ruined by such a declaration of payment. The second reason is more implicit. You don't pay people. When you pay you set up a different kind of relationship with your subject: they want to please you; you want your money's worth.

But Sereny charges on in her high-minded way, determined, against all the difficulties, "to tell her story as completely as it could be told, but also to use what had happened to her, and the reactions of others, as an example and a warning".

She thinks all this would be good for Mary, good for society, and good for Gitta. It may be good for Gitta, and it may help society see how wrong it is to simply punish brutalised children who become brutal. But when it comes to the broken girl herself, when it comes to Mary Bell, Cries Unheard is a production which is quite deficient of hearing. Mary wants some money, and she also wants to be normal. "You can't", a less detached author might have said, "you can't have both. So let's not try." This book has value, but not as much value as the lives it threatens to destroy.

The trouble with Sereny is that she has something of a tabloid mentality herself. She has a sensationalist manner of approach when it comes to questions of other people's moral nature, and takes pleasure in feeling personally close to the people she chooses to write books about. Here we find her telling us of Mary's visits to her house, her pet name, and Sereny's messianic role in bringing Mary into the realm of truth. And Sereny makes much out of that truth. She shores up her big story in classic tabloid style, opining that what Mary was saying in this book was her "telling the nearest she would probably ever get to the truth". A good way of advertising a story, but perhaps not true of Mary Bell.

One day she might find a way to speak up for herself. Tabloids like to manipulate manipulative people. And they like to show hurt people what is good for them. I never thought I'd say it. But Gitta Sereny could give them lessons.

A pleasure to disagree

David Hare

Threads of Time
by Peter Brook
Methuen 241pp £17.99

THE British theatre in the past 20 years has sometimes felt like a party being conducted with two of our most fascinating directors away on French leave. Their absence has haunted us, like a rebuke.

Anyone who saw the flowering of Joan Littlewood's troublesome genius can well understand why she went into an exile of grief on Baron Rothschild's estate in Medoc, but Peter Brook's decision to go to Paris to found an international centre for theatre research has always been more ambiguous. His new memoir is written, he says, to answer the question of why he went. The book is sometimes elegant, sometimes sketchy. But it still leaves you unsure whether the work that has flowed from that problematic choice — even including the wonderful Mahabharata and The Man Who — has ever had the sustained power that Brook achieved by more concentrated production techniques.

Brook presents the decision as inevitable. Born in 1925 in London, of Russian-Jewish parents, he was lucky enough, when coming upon a cardboard toy theatre as a child, to realise straight off that theatre is not just imitation, but metaphor as well. Although he proceeded dauntingly fast to become director of production at Covent Garden at the age of 22, and to be trusted as one of the star producers in the opulent, bourgeois world of Binky Beaumont, he was always inclined, as a genuine intellectual, to question what performance was, and to ask why its particular excitements (which he, like so many people before him, is reduced to calling that "something") could not be more reliably summoned up. How, in short, do you solve theatre's innate problem of repetition?

A follower of Gurdjieff, and a natural non-joiner of groups, he soon came to distrust both plays which he considered reductive or simplistic, and directors who imagined their job was to impose their "ideas" on great works of drama. His aim was a style that could be as open and suggestive as life itself. As someone who claimed to be able to understand Russian "through layers of sound far deeper than sense", he sought to investigate how what we experience as language is connected to what he calls art's "true beat and flow".

As you read Threads Of Time, you cannot doubt the virtue of Brook's inquiry, though sometimes, as the hitherto lucid prose turns dismayingly into the Esperanto patter of the higher mysticism, you are reminded of Schoenberg's famous remark that he did not particularly like 12-tone music, but that "someone had to do it".

But Brook's stunning pen-portraits of the high company he has flown in — Beckett, Brecht and Jean Genet are all brilliantly evoked — do make you wonder whether he has not turned into that familiar figure, the artist who despises what he does best.

Brook has always had a matchless talent for finding the extraordinary in the everyday, and then for distilling it with humour and awe. You ask yourself why someone who can write this well of Salvador Dali, or this lovingly of Jeanne Moreau, so undervalues his own gift of portraiture. And when Brook goes on to mention casually that he often wants to do contemporary work but that "the situations we encounter all the time rarely contain dimensions that go beyond their familiar limits", you also wonder whether he realises that he has just swept away Chekhov, O'Neill, Tennessee Williams and most of what is best in 20th century drama with the broad brush of his spiritual disdain.

Stage struck . . . Peter Brook and his wife Natasha Parry rehearsing Oh Les Beaux Jours in 1997 PHOTOGRAPH: NEIL LIBBERT

Interestingly, while Brook has been away, it is notable that the British theatre has appeared to improve by contrary principles. A new generation of British and Irish playwrights is giving London's theatres their most attentive audiences in years. The "something" that Brook searches for is most certainly happening at some of their plays, not because the nature of performance is being transformed, but because audiences thirst to hear what the writers are telling them. The thrilling classical revivals of the nineties — Howard Davies's The Iceman Cometh, Declan Donnellan's Fuente Ovejuna, and Jonathan Kent's Ivanov — have all come from intensely practical craftsmen who know how to harness a political and social view to an inborn personal lyricism.

To its special discredit, the British theatre is painfully short on experiment. For that reason alone, Threads Of Time is valuable. I cannot believe any serious practitioner could reach the last page without being powered up by a determination to make their own work better.

A serious reader will put this provocative book on a shelf next to his earlier book, The Empty Space, knowing that Peter Brook remains the theatre artist of our time whom it is the greatest honour to quarrel with.

Paperbacks

Desmond Christy

Oscar and Lucinda, by Peter Carey (Faber, £6.99); Screenplay of Oscar And Lucinda, by Laura Jones (£7.99)

A GREAT novel, and a deserved Booker winner, which tells of dragging a glass church, "as fine and elegant as civilisation itself", through the Australian bush, at fearful cost to all who lay eyes on it. Angela Carter described the novel, back in 1988, as "humming, buzzing, dancing with life and liveliness; it brings the past, in all its difference, bewilderingly into our present". No wonder the film could not live up to it.

Out of Sheer Rage, by Geoff Dyer (Abacus, £6.99)

ABOUT D H Lawrence, but that is much too direct. Dyer chats to us about New York, about Laura, Sicily, ticket collectors, traffic, miners, laziness, rainbows, women in love, rugby league, Oxford, children, Rilke, Hardy, coach travel, illness, Mexico, and — go on, I have to admit it — along the way we learn more about Lawrence than we would from a scholar who diligently sat in the British Library for a few years. Dyer, Laura and Lawrence are wonderful travel companions.

Brewer's British Royalty, by David Williamson (Cassell, £14.99)

THERE are so many of them — at least the Greek gods have stopped multiplying — that they get their own "phrase and fable dictionary". Take Charlotte: "George V's pet parrot, which accompanied him everywhere and was allowed to walk on the breakfast table. If she made a mess the king slipped the mustard pot over it." The entry on Diana is longer than Charlotte's but much shorter than that of Mrs Fitzherbert.

Great Apes, by Will Self (Penguin, £6.99)

MARKETING idea — have a mirror on the cover so that we could see our Self image, never a pretty sight. This is Planet Of The Apes with a vengeance. Not only are the apes in charge, they have always been in charge. Humans? Kept where they belong — in the zoo. Simon Dykes thinks he is human, but this is a delusion. Can he be cured? Will Self takes us on a guided tour of chimpanzee civilisation, and we find we recognise it like the hairy back of our hands.

Saved, by Tony Bullimore (Warner, £6.99)

HAPPY hours ahead if you are a fan of this kind of thing: "Jackson-Calway closed the file and began thinking out loud. 'Yes, but if he's inside, why hasn't he operated his 406 EPIRB? Then we'd know for sure.'" The life, near-death and rescue of Tony Bullimore from his overturned Exide Challenger is a pacey, nicely constructed piece of (ghost?) writing that reads like a thriller. Bullimore was soon back at sea, so the sequel could be bobbing to the surface. Listen out for his 406 EPIRB.

The name of the reviewer of British cinema books (May 3) should have been Jonathan Coe, not Cooper

A travelling talesman

Ian Jack

Beyond Belief
by V S Naipaul
Little Brown 448pp £20

IN 1979 and 1980, V S Naipaul made a tour of Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia and reached the conclusion, in Among The Believers, that Islam was a poor receptacle for political needs; it couldn't teach people how to run a modern state. Fifteen years later, he made a tour of the same countries and in his new book reaches a further conclusion — that because the Islam in these countries is what he calls the Islam of converts — Arabs being the original believers — it has cut off people from their pasts and caused them to "develop fantasies about who and what they are". In them, there is "an element of neurosis and nihilism". They can be easily set on the boil".

But perhaps this isn't so much a new conclusion as an expansion of the first. In his introduction, Naipaul denies that Beyond Belief has any "conclusions". His book is entirely made from the complex stories of the people he has met or met again. So perhaps it is better to think of his view as a working thesis rather than anything arrived at by observation and deduction. Naipaul offers no comparisons with Christianity and its effect on "converted peoples", nor has he visited Arab countries to demonstrate how, say, Saudis are less fantastical and neurotic than Iranians. So perhaps it is better again to think of this thesis as prejudice; sometimes moderated by the people he meets, but always stubbornly there and finding new ways to seep into the narrative.

I would have it no other way, because Naipaul could write a book in no other way and any book by him is worth having. Stretches of it are as good as anything he has ever written, but sometimes it is not an easy book to carry on reading. There is a sense of scraping away, not at the bottom of the barrel, but in the way Naipaul now approaches the act of writing; a search for some kind of purity, or a prophylactic against exhaustion. He writes in his introduction of his steady retreat from travel books of "landscape and autobiography" in which he features as the writer-traveller. Now he has pared himself from the script to become what he was at the beginning of his career — a writer of fiction, a manager of narrative, where other people's stories come to the front.

This is a tricky business. The stories of individual lives are quite properly shown to be intricate and subtle. Islam has touched them in different ways at different times with spectacularly various results. One man volunteers for the Martyrs' Brigade in Iran and fights in the long, great war against Iraq to return mentally and physically shattered. Another hitches himself to a political bandwagon of "Muslim intellectuals" in Indonesia and achieves worldly success. But Naipaul exaggerates his withdrawal. He's always there as the listener and interlocutor, puzzling over his notes, regretting his failure to ask a vital question, going back to rectify a gap. People have filled his books ever since he met some West Indian migrants on a Southampton boat-train in The Middle Passage 36 years ago. The difference now is that Naipaul is more scrupulous with them, and more concerned to discover why they are as they are.

HE HAS also moderated his judgments; he sees people in a more sympathetic light. Occasionally the old, comically fastidious, Brahminical persona shoots through ("the chambermaid was fat and brassy . . . with a definite smell from wearing so many clothes, some of them perhaps of synthetic material"), but he usually manages to place himself in the context of his subjects' stories with the sly, rhythmic craft that has made him one of the very best writers of English prose, alive or dead.



V S Naipaul: a manager of narratives PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN REARDON

Still, I would not want him as my therapist. There is tension in the book between understanding, even celebrating, individual lives, and at the same time punishing them for their lack of wholeness (an old Naipaul notion). At times, entire societies are savaged for their unsustainable political beliefs. It is difficult to disagree with his verdicts on Pakistan and Iran, or with the proposition that "religious or cultural purity is a fundamentalist fantasy . . . [outside tribal communities] everyone lives in his own way with his complexity", but interesting to see that he won't allow fantasy to be part of this complexity.

It can be, of course, a particularly dangerous fantasy. There is (or was) in Tehran a Mr Jaffrey, a reporter with a gift for cantankerous copy. Jaffrey believes in the *jamé towhidi*, the society of believers. He is Indian, but because India was dominated by Hindus he leaves Lucknow for Pakistan. Because Pakistan is dominated by Sunnis, and he is a Shia, he then quits Pakistan for Iran. Then the Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution comes – at last, the true society of believers! — but soon Jaffrey is an unhappy as before. When Naipaul meets him in 1979, he is at his typewriter rapping out "peppery calls" for the mullahs to get back to their mosques.

When Naipaul returns 16 years later, he learns Jaffrey's fate. He was wanted by revolutionary students — they had found payments to him from the Voice of America — and he had fled back to Pakistan and there he had died. "Mr Jaffrey's dream of the *jamé towhidi* was to him so pure and sweet that he hadn't begun to go into its contradictions . . . Mr Jaffrey was suffering now from the 'fanatics'. But in his own way he was like them."

There are many other brilliant pieces of small biography. There is Mr Ali, a property developer and early supporter of Iran's revolution, who says: "We expected something heavenly to happen, something emotional . . . We were hypnotised by their stories of the French Revolution. We all thought revolution was something beautiful, done by God, something like music, like a concert . . . We were happy that we were part of the theatre. We were the actors now." (But that was before other actors put him in prison.)

Naipaul writes at his precise, observational best in such sections, but at the heart of this book there seems to me something unresolved and unexpectedly mystical. Puzzling over the "fundamentalist rage against the [pre-Islamic] past" in these countries of Muslim conversion, he describes his own history. How, when still quite young, he began to feel that "there was an incompleteness, an emptiness" about his birthplace, Trinidad, and that the real world existed somewhere else. Much later, when he saw the roadside shrines of Bombay, he came to see that "people who lived so intimately with the idea of the sacredness of their earth were different from us". Trinidad had had its sacred places, but the aboriginal inhabitants who knew about them had been wiped out, to be replaced by "people like us, whose sacred places were in other continents".

He concludes: "Perhaps it is this absence of the sense of sacredness that we of the New World travel to the Old to discover." It may be. But loose ideas are at work here, with a lineage that twists through Kipling and the Englishness of England in the 1890s to Australian films in the eighties with guilty noises about displaced Aborigines. The sacredness of particular pieces of earth has supplied more "neurosis" and "fantasy" in the past century than Islamic conversion has managed, despite the examples of Pakistan and Iran. It has a particularly glorious period between 1933 and 1945, in Germany.

By the standards of Naipaul's previous work, this is not a great book. But I can think of few other writers engaged in the business of depicting the real who could come close to matching many parts of it.

Overdrawn at the bank of fiction

James Wood

A Widow For One Year
by John Irving
Bloomsbury 547pp £16.99

REALISM gives John Irving a good name: he is lucky to hitch his wagon to it. Since The World According To Garp (1978), Irving has been praised for the "realism" of his novels — for their tossed plots, for the fat suffusions of these big books, for the reliability of his solid characters, and for the salve of his sassy comedy. He is often likened to Dickens. Humanly, these are not negligible qualities; but they do not, perhaps, amount to literature.

Realism has proved itself beautifully flexible and longeval, but that longevity has depended on the novelist's ability to flex it anew, to wrestle fresh postures from its strength. Irving merely relies on the conventions of realism as one relies on punctuation: he writes fiction as if reality were transparent, as if characters' consciousnesses simply float to hand — as if reality were as manageable for the writer as are the conventions of realism.

It is, of course, an artistic triumph to write like Dickens only in the age of Dickens; to do so at the end of the 20th century marks Irving as, at best, an unimportant realist: to believe as heartily in fictional transparency as Irving does seems artistically trivial. But this is not a mere aesthetic quibble; it goes to the human centre of Irving's books.

Though his novels are terrifically busy, with enforcements and diversions of all kinds, they are actually deprived of true struggle, because his characters struggle only with situations, and not with themselves. His characters have an inch of consciousness, and with this inch Irving is seductively gymnastic. But his characters exist for us only in practised simplicities.

There is much that is delightful about his latest novel, A Widow For One Year. It tells the story of Ruth Cole, and her strange entanglement with Eddie O'Hare. In the summer of 1958, Eddie, who is just 16, arrives at the house of Ruth's parents for a summer job. Ruth is only four; her parents are in the middle of a vicious divorce, and young Eddie soon finds himself having a passionate affair with Ruth's beautiful mother, Marion.

None of the protagonists really recovers from this gross incursion, at least not until the very end of the novel; the rest of the book is a history of damage. Marion walks out on her husband, on her daughter, and on Eddie, and is not seen again until 1995. Eddie devotes his adulthood to the memory of Marion. (Eventually he finds her.) Ruth grows up to be a famous novelist, but she is angry at her abandonment, and incapable of happy relations with men. She marries, has a son, is widowed, and marries again. (Eventually, she finds the right man: a Dutch policeman.)

Both Ruth and Eddie, who become friends as adults, are strongly drawn. In Ruth, Irving relaxes his exuberant comic literalism, and allows indirection a little sway. But neither is a truly deep creation. This is because Irving, though a "comic" writer, does not believe in a comedy that demands very much from either his characters or his readers.

The tone may be gauged from a sentence about Eddie's first month at the Coles' house, while his youthful obsession with Marion is growing but has not yet been consummated: "For the first month of that summer, Eddie O'Hare would be a Masturbating Machine." This phrase also heads the same chapter, "A Masturbating Machine." Irving is always thumping his characters with his own sense of comedy, rather than rewarding them with their own. It is difficult for a real adolescent to emerge from the authorial guffaws; he is, precisely, a machine — a machine of comedy.

In other words, Irving's comedy tends towards farce because it is situational rather than characterological. Comedy in literature arose out of satire, and in particular out of the exposure of hypocrisy. But it has its root in individuals, and lives on the principle not that people are funny, or that funny things happen to them, but on the contrary, that people are serious. Irving's comedy trivialises his characters because that comedy is not unique to them; it could have happened to anyone.

One example will have to suffice. Eddie, who grows up to be a somewhat bumbling and pathetic man, does not meet the adult Ruth until 1990. Ruth is now 36 and a celebrated novelist; Eddie is 48 and a very minor novelist. He has long rehearsed what he is going to say to the woman he knew as a toddler, "My goodness, how you've grown!" But when he enters the room he is flustered, and says "My goodness, how you've grown!" to the first woman who approaches him. Of course, this is not Ruth Cole, but Melissa, an organiser of the event, and Irving squeezes the situation with his characteristic vitality (and italics): "Melissa, who had *not* grown — she was not pregnant at the time, either — was somewhat taken aback."

The question is not whether this is funny or not; it is whether this kind of comedy could possibly illuminate Eddie's soul rather than the situation he has stumbled into. Of course, it illuminates his confusions, his nervousness; but these are the simplicities of character, these are where a novelist of depth begins, not where he ends.

This novel streams with charm and life, and hustles the reader on a wonderful voyage, from Long Island to the red-light districts of Amsterdam, and back again. It is rich and buoyant. Yet neither in its conception of reality nor in its warmth of comedy does it ever fail to be uncomplicated. And for once, one wanted a novel to fail a little.

Cricket South African tour

White Lightning ready to strike

Frank Keating profiles the pace man limbering up for the assault on England

AFTER their ultimately rootless and fidgety show in the West Indies, England's batsmen this spring could be forgiven a collective sigh of relief and a presumption that the home waters will be far less choppy this summer.

If so, they have another think coming. Allan Donald is pawing the earth at the end of his run-up — and this time the great man can count on the support of a seasoned and sharply hostile pair of lieutenants in Shaun Pollock and Lance Klusener. The five Test series will surely turn on England's ability to cope with South Africa's new ball attack.

Donald is the athlete in the white war paint. He is 6ft 3in tall and lithe with whipcord-strong shoulders and long arms. Thirty-two this autumn, it is 11 years since he came from the Afrikaans heartland of Bloemfontein to play in Birmingham for Warwickshire. The tag "White Lightning" was at once applied; it stuck. Each succeeding summer, and winter back home, the description became increasingly apt and now, at the very top of his game, he is Test cricket's finest full-lick fast bowler since Dennis Lillee.

Figures one can take or leave, sure. But not when they are as adjectivally colourful as Donald's this past couple of years. In his previous glut of international cricket, in 1996-97 for instance, Donald took 99 wickets: 41 in Tests at 19 runs apiece and 58 in one-day internationals at 17. In the last three years, his Test wicket bag of 120 at an average of 19.62 has him towering over his rivals (Wasim Akram 20.61; Curtly Ambrose 20.75; Glenn McGrath 20.77). In March, his 11th Test "five-for" took him past 200 Test wickets, a feat that no other South African bowler has even been close to achieving. In county cricket, his last two summers at Edgbaston have garnered 60 wickets at 15, and 89 at 16.

Donald has been very happy in England; he has a house in Birmingham and is married to Tina, a local girl. He came from there to meet his international team-mates when they arrived at Heathrow earlier this month — and the team joke is that he'd been sent in advance to "chat up" his friend, the Edgbaston groundsman Steve Rouse, and help organise his preparations for the first Test, which begins there on June 4.

Donald is fully aware that his time in English cricket has been a continual learning process. "The county experience has been a non-stop school, first length and line and how to adapt to all the varying surfaces of a summer. When I first arrived I was reasonably OK about slanting the ball in. Now I can swing it away. Then there's reverse-swing, and the use of a bouncer as a surprise." On the whole he is a "full-length" bowler, and all the more classically lethal as a wicket-taker for it.

More than once, his run-up, and hence his crucial rhythm and "melody", has fallen to pieces, notably in the last World Cup when he began hosepiping wides all over the subcontinent. "Bob [Woolmer, then Warwickshire's coach and now South Africa's] sorted me all out with his stopwatches and videos." Donald was moving in at too eager a gallop, thus losing his creamy momentum of coiled, mainsprung menace. Apparently, the run-up time was reined back from 3.29sec to 4.11. In the past 18 months he has tight-pruned the run-up a further notch, "and made a tiny adjustment to my wrist at delivery".

His suppleness is all — he can touch his toes with his forearms. If craftsmanship is that specialised absorption in high-class, bespoke work for its own sake then, as true-great fast bowlers go, he is the craftsman among them.



Up to the mark . . . in March Donald passed 200 Test wickets, a feat no other South African has achieved PHOTOGRAPH. ALLSPORT

Soon this summer Donald will take his 1,000th first-class wicket since that day in Bloemfontein in 1986 when three former English cricketers, Roger Prideaux and the Warwickshire men, David Brown and Jack Bannister, were watching an isolated South Africa's then best young fast bowler, Corrie van Zyl. "Hang on a min," the three old timers chorused, "Who's that skinny blond kid with all the raw potential at the other end?" It was Donald, whose first first-class wicket was Jimmy Cook's, and he was summoned to Birmingham in no time.

Among the Brummies, it doesn't help your shyness if your first language is Afrikaans. At first, famously, Donald thought "optional" nets were compulsory and vice versa, so Edgbaston thought "we've got a right one here". As a bowler, they soon knew what they had when he took eight wickets in his first pre-season friendly match to demolish Leicestershire for 58.

When he passes his 1,000, which will he nominate as the best ball of all? He just smiles, no guile in it. You offer the prompt: the 1996 Christmas Test v India at Durban? After a poor South African first innings, Donald removed Vikram Rathore, bringing out Sachin Tendulkar to put him in his place with two defiant cover drives for four.

The next ball, on a perfect length, drew the grand bat forward, then swung back dramatically to ping out the off stump. Tendulkar, bowled Donald, 15. The soft smile again: "You always get fired up that bit extra when you bowl to the greats, like Sachin or the Waughs, don't you?" Or, it will go without saying this summer, any Englishman.

South Africa v Worcs

Donald is too hot to handle for Hick's men

Vic Marks at New Road

THIS must be how they envisage a cricket tour of England on the veld; cloudless skies, straw hats, ripples of polite applause, the flag of St George fluttering on a cathedral devoid of scaffolding, naughty cakes in the ladies' pavilion.

Worcestershire, conscientiously led by Graeme Hick, provided worthy opposition, without being too taxing. And they provided the tourists with a morale-boosting victory by 89 runs. Set 279 to win in 62 overs the home side collapsed from 125 for one to 189 all out. More significantly for the big battles ahead, Allan Donald is already on target.

His first five overs last Sunday were deceptive; they were fast, but ill-directed and wicketless; 32 runs were conceded. No problems for Philip Weston and Vikram Solanki. Donald later admitted he felt "awful" with the new ball. His second spell was rather more productive; it lasted 13 overs and he took six for 24. No wonder Hansie Cronje saves him for the middle of the innings in one-day matches.

Admittedly Donald's first three wickets came when Worcestershire's batsmen were optimistically chasing their target, and all stemmed from outfield catches. But the next three were the product of raw pace.

Only Hick, who hit a splendid 58 from 70 balls, looked remotely comfortable against him. Curiously Hick's crisp strokeplay probably aided the South African cause by keeping the home side in the hunt: his partners felt obliged to attack Donald as well and they weren't up to it.

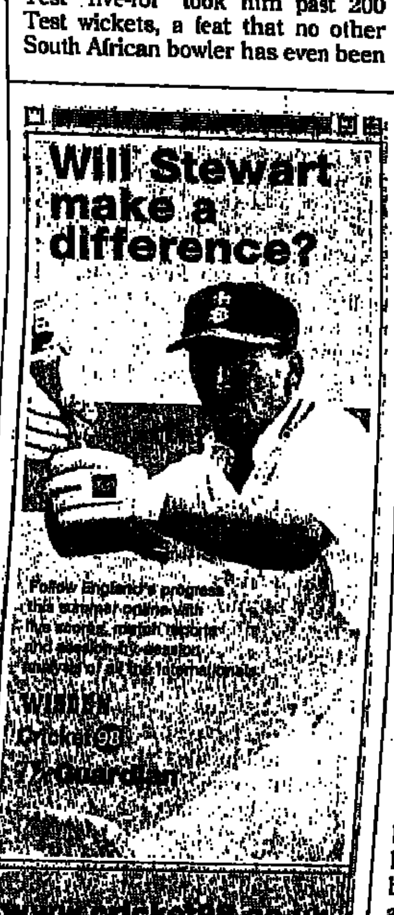
Donald's allies were Lance Klusener, a gritty, honest paceman, who poses no obvious threat but who expects wickets and often gets them, the wily medium pacer Cronje, who disposed of Solanki when he was looking dangerous, and Paul Adams, unable to penetrate until the very end when he snatched the final wicket of Philip Newport, caught at slip with just four balls remaining.

So the South African bowlers, given the luxury of running up sweaterless on lush, forgiving grass, enjoyed a highly satisfactory work-out. Moreover all their batsmen, with the exception of John Rhodes, scored some runs. They have acclimatised without too many dramas.

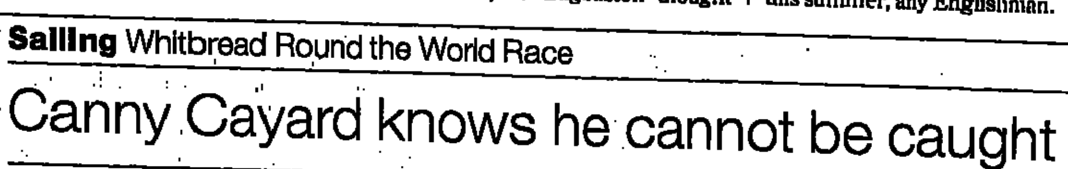
Their top-order line-up is solid rather than scintillating. In this match Jacques Kallis, drawing on his experiences with Middlesex last summer, looked the most comfortable. He scored 75 in the first innings and finished with 74 in the second.

The visitors' declaration came 15 minutes after lunch and it was sufficiently seductive to ensure a victory for them — thanks to Donald. — *The Observer*

South Africans 287-4dec & 219-6dec beat **Worcestershire** 228-6dec & 189 by 89 runs



Sailing Whitbread Round the World Race



Canny Cayard knows he cannot be caught

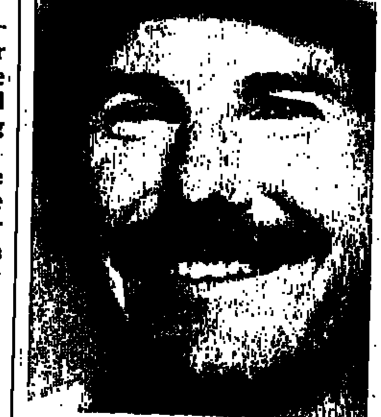
Bob Fisher in La Rochelle

EF LANGUAGE and her skipper Paul Cayard have rewritten the record book in the Whitbread Round the World Race by winning with a leg to spare.

Cayard's boat crossed the line here in sixth place at the end of the eighth leg, one place ahead of her nearest challenger, Gunnar Krantz's Swedish Match. The result put Cayard 115 points clear of Krantz and, with only 105 points on offer for the last leg back to Southampton, EF Language is uncatchable.

"When did you know you were going to win?" Cayard was asked, but before he could reply Magnus Olsson interrupted on his skipper's behalf: "When we sold Smith!".

Olsson, who had been an organiser of the campaign from the start before sailing as a watch leader, released his pent-up anger with a broad smile. A crusade going back almost 20 years was over, but he had been largely responsible for the recruitment of Lawrie Smith as skipper and had taken the Briton's departure to Silk Cut as a personal affront.



Cayard: winning smile

As the winning crew submitted to the questions, they greeted Olsson's intervention with laughter. "We had a specific mission on this leg," said Cayard, "to beat Swedish Match at all costs, to eliminate any risk of them winning the race overall."

Earlier, Smith had been beaten to the finish by his former lieutenant Paul Standbridge, in Toshiba, after a 500-mile match race from the time they crossed tracks out in the Atlantic. Although they were never more than two miles apart in the run-in, it was only on the final morning when the fog cleared that Standbridge was able to see Silk Cut.

Toshiba beat her home by only 10 minutes. The British boat is the highest points scorer since the fleet left Brazil and still has a chance of finishing second overall after the final 450-mile sprint which begins on Friday.

Two and a half hours after Smith crossed the line, John Kostecki's Chessie Racing claimed the third podium place, but the tumultuous welcome was reserved for Christine Guillou and the all-women crew of EF Education.

Their magnificent fourth place ranks alongside Isabelle Autissier's first-leg rout of the fleet in the BOC Around Alone four years ago. It is no coincidence that Autissier was aboard EF Education for the transatlantic leg.

Rugby Union Allied Dunbar Premiership One: Harlequins 20 Newcastle Falcons 44

Falcons carry off the title

Robert Armstrong at The Stoop

AMID extraordinary scenes of jubilation, Newcastle celebrated their historic triumph in the Allied Dunbar Premiership with the same passion they had brought to their exciting title-clinching victory here in London last Sunday. Hundreds of ecstatic supporters chanted "Champions, champions" in front of the main stand as the players popped bottle after bottle of champagne over their heads and brandished their trophy after finishing one point ahead of Saracens.

It was a fitting conclusion to Newcastle's campaign which began last August with a win at Bath and moved into top gear with last month's victory over Saracens at Kingston Park. Sir John Hall, the Newcastle owner, was presented with a championship medal thanks to the club coach Steve Bates, who found there was a "spare" after the players had collected theirs.

Carried away . . . Rob Andrew who scored 19 points for his side PHOTOGRAPH. DAVID RODGERS

Six excellent tries and brilliantly sustained pressure football brooked no argument as the Falcons swept aside Harlequins. Both clubs had spent roughly the same on assembling teams of internationals, but the resolute spirit that shone through every Newcastle move proved there is more to building a side than mere cash.

"We scored the most tries and the most points in the Premiership; we deserved to be champions," said Rob Andrew, Newcastle's director of rugby. "We are pleased to be part of something that has set the game alight."

Newcastle, who next season will probably defend their title at a new home, Gateshead International Stadium, have won respect from their rivals for what is perceived to be a basic style of play founded on relentless forward power. However, the versatile way they demolished Quins showed that their players have become accomplished all-round footballers this season.

No one illustrates the Newcastle method better than the Scottish scrum-half Gary Armstrong, who scored two fine tries and combined the vision of a play-maker with the raw strength of a flanker.

Newcastle had the game well within their grasp by half-time, having crowned powerful driving with three short-range tries as well as resisting Quins' half-hearted attempts to generate momentum down the flanks.

It took Newcastle 14 minutes to cross the Quins line, Richard Arnold clearing the way for Armstrong to score to the right of the posts. Midway through the first half he exploited a Quins mix-up involving Keith Wood and Jamie Williams and drove through to score on the left.

Quins made their mark with a couple of long-range penalty goals, given for offside, by Thierry Lacroix, but shortly before half-time Newcastle turned the screw with an opportunist try by Nick Popplewell after Armstrong's flip pass had released Pat Lam. And after 48 minutes Andrew's scorching run culminated in a try near the posts which, with the conversion, put Newcastle 29-6 in front.

Quins were unable to build on a superb solo try by their scrum-half Huw Harries. On the hour a storming drive down the left by Peter Walton set off a try for Lam, who sprinted home from 25 metres, and towards the end Armstrong was driven over by Newcastle's rampant pack for his second try.

Andrew kicked four conversions and two penalty goals which, with his try, gave him 19 points. Dan Luger's last-minute try flattered Quins, whose lack of firepower made a remarkable contrast with the points-scoring machine that is Newcastle.

Football European Cup Winners' Cup final: Chelsea 1 VfB Stuttgart 0

Quick-fire Zola lights up Chelsea

Martin Thorpe in Stockholm

CHELSEA last week completed their most successful trip on the tight-rope they regularly walk between vulnerability in defence and verve in attack, to lift the European Cup Winners' Cup.

A 70th-minute goal from Gianfranco Zola, who had been on the pitch for only 45 seconds, brought the southwest London side their first European trophy since 1971.

The early advantage was Chelsea's, with their fans occupying not only three tiers behind one goal but most of two tiers behind the other which were supposed to be neutral, after the Germans failed to sell the bulk of their allocation.

As a result the Rasunda Stadium could have been Stamford Bridge on a spring evening, with the sun setting behind one stand and a chorus of "One Man Went To Mow" rising from another.

A day fuelled by optimism and Swedish beer was dampened by the news that Zola had suffered a setback in training, and after all the positive words about his presence in the starting line-up after a long injury lay-off he was on the bench. His place went to Tore Andre Flo.

The denial of Zola's experience in this sort of high-pressure game was as crucial as the loss of his prompting skills up front. But Chelsea also had to cope with the unavailability of Graeme Le Saux, missing with injury and taking with him further top-level experience.

This presented a true test of character for the young full-back replacement, Danny Granville, who, playing for Cambridge United last season, could not have envisaged he would be taking part in such a high-profile game just over a year later.

He was, though, reassured by the confidence with which the older hands around him began the match, strutting purposefully towards the Stuttgart goal and going close after only six minutes.

Really it was a chance Chelsea should have put away. A clever move ended with Gustavo Poyet feeding Roberto Di Matteo who unleashed a shot which scooted disappointingly wide.

Alerted perhaps by this early let-off, Stuttgart slowly but ominously came into the game. On 12 minutes Steve Clarke's skewed clearance fell invitingly for Fredi Bobic, whose clear run to the area ended with a wasteful shot beyond Ed De Goey's right-hand post.

Two minutes later the Stuttgart captain met Krasimir Balakov's corner with a header which again sailed just wide. And five minutes after that let-off, Chelsea allowed Balakov to spring from his position in the hole behind the strikers with a run at the heart of their defence which brushed aside Clarke's challenge and ended with a vital save from De Goey.

Although Stuttgart's more studious possession had created these chances, towards half-time Chelsea's ability to move the ball forward quickly on the break brought them back into the game. A Flo header landed on top of the net, Di Matteo's first-time shot was beaten away by Franz Wohlfahrt and a Dennis Wise volley went wide.

As a result Chelsea went into half-time more bugyed than they might have been. And when they emerged from the interval they seemed to have more spring in their step. After 53 minutes Wise shot just wide. Five minutes later Granville went closer from 19 yards, forcing the German keeper to save to his right.

But on 70 minutes Chelsea's coach on the bench, Graham Rix, made what turned out to be a momentous substitution as he replaced Flo with Zola.

Within 45 seconds of his appearance on the pitch the Italian striker had put Chelsea ahead and broken the deadlock. Wise, from a central position about 35 yards out, fed a perceptive ball forward which bisected the Stuttgart defence and fell perfectly for Zola, inside the area, to fire past Wohlfahrt. Not surprisingly, the Chelsea supporters, and the Chelsea team, went wild with delight.

The London team's celebrations will be shared by Aston Villa, who though seventh in the Premiership, now qualify for the Uefa Cup because Chelsea will be required to defend their title.



Zola: scored the vital goal

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Drop-outs spark row

A BITTER row erupted after a much-changed, 37-strong rugby squad — the biggest England have taken on tour — was announced for the forthcoming tour of the southern hemisphere. Clive Woodward, the England coach, expressed disappointment over the unprecedented withdrawal of a dozen Test players. He named Northampton's Matt Dawson as captain for the tour of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa because Lawrence Dallaglio needs to rest his injured shoulder.

The announcement of the squad attracted a sharp rebuke from the Australian Rugby Union, who branded the selection as "insulting" and called for sanctions. Dick McGruther, the ARU chairman, said he would recommend to the International Board in Dublin this week that England be stripped of the right to host a pool at next year's World Cup as punishment for choosing "probably the most under-equipped group of Englishmen sent to Australia since the First Fleet. We are disappointed and insulted. It is stretching the imagination to think they have to pick 17 uncapped players."

ULSTERMAN Darren Clarke, whose temper tantrums have often marred his game in the past, kept a cool head to pick up the biggest winner's cheque of his career, $200,000, in the Benson & Hedges International Open at The Oxfordshire. He closed with a 67 for a total of 273, 15 under par, to win by three strokes from the Spaniard, Santiago Luna.

THE Australian Michael Doohan won his sixth successive 500cc Italian Grand Prix, but local hero Max Biaggi finished second to extend his world championship lead at the Mugello circuit in Tuscany. Alex Criville of Spain completed a Honda clean sweep.

THE Football Association inquiry into the controversial challenge by Alan Shearer on Neil Lennon during Newcastle United's game against Leicester City at Filbert Street last month cleared the England captain of any wrongdoing. It accepted Shearer's version that the contact made by his boot with Lennon's head was the result of a "genuine attempt" to free his leg.

BRITISH newspapers were given a strong "mind your language" warning in their coverage of the football World Cup in France. Lord Wakeham, chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, said: "We want to have robust reporting of the World Cup, but I don't want newspapers inadvertently, or in any other way, inciting fans to violence and to cause trouble."

His comments came after the commission cleared the Daily Star of being racist and offensive in its coverage of the French sale of tickets. Seven people complained after the tabloid ran an editorial under the headline: "Frogs need a good kicking." It added that the French had "grabbed the lion's share" of tickets, "typical of their slimy continental ways".

In a separate development, police in London arrested eight Algerians under the Prevention of Terrorism Act amid suggestions they were planning to disrupt the World Cup.

THE BBC'S summer of sport, including coverage of Wimbledon and Royal Ascot, is under threat after thousands of staff voted for strike action starting next month over working conditions.